Commentary
October 1997

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Cars and Their Enemies: An Exchange
James Q. Wilson and Critics

Books in Review
Walter Laqueur • Gary Rosen • Heather Mac Donald
Algis Valiunas • Christopher Caldwell

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Commentary®

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Commentary
October 1997

Letters from Readers

Cars and Their Enemies

To the Editor:

I think James Q. Wilson ["Cars and Their Enemies," July] protests too much. It is hard to see what the point of his carless-nation scenario is when no one of any consequence advocates it. One need not be a "car-hater" to entertain the idea that there is something slightly out of balance in our transportation system.

Mr. Wilson's paranoid fear of a nonexistent campaign to "eliminate" cars belies a curious strain of modern conservatism that worships highways, cars, airplanes, buses, and jitneys, but hates railroads, subways, streetcars, cities, towns, and urban life in general.

Many conservatives loathe cities and everything associated with them simply because they have been run by liberal mayors and councils for the last 50 years. In a way it is hard to blame them. But it is no accident of history that the golden age of cities and railroads in America coincided with the golden age of capitalism, wealth creation, and individualism. Conversely, it is not mere coincidence that the rise of the interstate-highway system followed the New Deal and paralleled the postwar growth of government and the decline of values. Conservatives would do well not to abandon institutions simply because they have been coopted and perverted by the Left.

Underlying this paranoid view is the baseless assumption that the supremacy of the automobile in American life is due to the free interplay of market forces. Mr. Wilson casually dismisses the argument that public policies "make auto use more attractive than the alternatives," but the federal government has been a huge player in creating the transportation and life-style options that consumers face today.

Mr. Wilson makes all the usual arguments in favor of a car-only society: that cars are flexible, that you can drive anywhere from anywhere. These arguments are true if and only if you have built roads all over the place. Spend enough of other people's money on the appropriate infrastructure, and any transportation method will be convenient, fast, and marginally cheap.

The vast majority of American drivers spend their time on six-lane arterials, surrounded by fast-food joints and gas stations, lining up in protected turning lanes for three or four light cycles, just to make a left. And this routine is repeated for every aspect of life: going to work, taking the kids to soccer practice, picking up a quart of milk, or going out to a bar or restaurant. Because of the type of development Mr. Wilson favors, cars are no longer "about the joyous sensation of driving on beautiful country roads."

The evolution of development always goes through the same stages. First, homes sprout up alongside the country road. Then full-fledged developments open up. More people follow, and when a critical mass is reached, the fast-food joints, convenience stores, condos, and town houses are not far behind. The two-lane blacktop road, which was fine for the occasional car and farmer's tractor, is now woefully inadequate at handling rush-hour traffic. Road widening, straightening, and traffic lights follow, and it's bye-bye, country road.

It is deliciously ironic that as Mr. Wilson was writing his article, he tells us, his wife was attempting to "prevent a nearby land development," desperately trying to preserve their style of life at the expense of other people's property rights. It won't be long before they are moving to the next new suburb, one step ahead of the masses.

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For the record, I own a full-size '88 Dodge pickup and an '88 Acura Legend with leather seats. I love both of them, and cannot imagine life without them. But I still wish there were some other way to get from downtown Scranton, Pennsylvania, to downtown New York City without spending two harrowing hours on Interstate 80, where most drivers feel that an appropriate following distance is one foot for every ten miles per hour.

PAUL S. MANSOUR
Scranton, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

I do not know what sort of suburbs James Q. Wilson lived in while his children were growing up, but his description suggests that they had the gridded or semi-gridded street networks, the close connection between residential and commercial districts, and the walkability typical of suburbs built between the two world wars.

One cannot say the same for most post-World War II suburban developments. The car is not entirely to blame for this; misguided theories about land use also played a significant role. But the convenience, efficiency, and flexibility of the car did lead builders, designers, and transportation engineers to produce communities that are easily traversable by car—but by no other means. Such an arrangement may not diminish community activity as much as the critics say it does, but it does diminish the opportunities that exist in walkable communities for chance contacts among residents, which help cement neighborhood ties, and for the type of direct surveillance by residents that enhances safety and security.

More importantly, the freedom of action for those who cannot drive is severely restricted, or eliminated entirely. Most of us can probably recall, as children, walking to a park, playground, or neighbor's house for unorganized play. In the autocentric suburb, children must be chauffeured to organized recreational activities.

It is these aspects of life and community in the automobile-age suburb that the urbanist critics of the car find so disagreeable. The arguments in favor of the car as a means of transportation do nothing to address these criticisms.

SANDY SMITH
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

As someone with great respect and admiration for James Q. Wilson, I knew that the best thing I could do after he criticized the anti-suburban piece that I wrote for the *Weekly Standard* would be to go back to my article and see where I had gone wrong. In doing so, I realized that I had mistakenly given the impression that I hate cars. As someone who dreams of owning a BMW convertible and who as a child spent six hours every weekend driving to and from the eastern shore of Maryland with my family, this could not be further from the truth.

What I failed to make clear in my article, "The New Conservative Attack on the Suburbs," is that the modern suburb, simply by its design, has had a deleterious effect on the civic life and mental health of our country, and that the problem has little to do with cars. While it is true that suburbs make us overly dependent on automobiles, and this has a high cost, the real damage caused by suburbs is the loss of public spaces that once fostered community and filled lives with a degree of meaning and happiness. The tragedy is that, had we not adopted dumb zoning regulations, we could have had both cars and community. Kentlands, the neotraditional town in Maryland with schools, shopping, and playgrounds within walking distance, as well as upper-middle-class families with two cars, is proof of that.

As Mr. Wilson probably remembers, America was once a place of cities and small towns. These were places built to human scale, with stores, bars, dance halls, and other hubs of community life within walking distance or reachable by public transportation. In his wonderful book, *The Great Good Place: Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day*, the sociologist Ray Oldenburg explored the deep spiritual, social, and political benefits of such "third places," which have been largely replaced by shopping malls and ersatz third places like Borders and Starbucks.

In *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, the late Christopher Lasch took up Oldenburg's idea, explaining that third places can be considered even more vital to democracy than the neighborhood associations Mr. Wilson's wife zips to—no doubt in her minivan, the suburban assault vehicle of choice. Here is how Lasch described Oldenburg's idea:

> The home of good talk is the third place—a meeting ground midway between the workplace and the family. . . . You can expect to find a core of regulars at the third place, but you also meet casual acquaintances and complete strangers. . . . It is this admixture of involuntary association that gives the third places a quasi-political character. In this milieu, recognition has to be achieved through force of character instead of being conferred by your achievements, let alone by the size of your bank account. . . .

I understand that I am something of a zealot and a dreamer on this issue, but I cannot help thinking that the return to traditional values conservatives hunger for could be precipitated by a return to small-town planning. As Lasch noted, when neighbors know one another through frequent contact in third places, it fosters conscience, "the inner voice that asks what the guys would think." I believe that it is possible to get back to such an America.

MARK GAUVREAU JUDGE
Potomac, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

The most implacable enemies of the car are suburban motorists themselves. To be sure, they welcome more highways, wider highways, more urban amenities to drive to, and an abundance of parking spaces at all these destinations. But none of these in their own neighborhoods, if you please; that would violate the sanctity of single-family, detached, residential zoning. Ferocious urban traffic wars have impelled the shift to hierarchical street lay-

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outs, in which through traffic is channeled onto arterials, and winding local streets finally exhaust themselves in culs-de-sac and dead ends.

With considerably fewer connections than in traditional grid layouts, the strict segregation of nonresidential uses, and steadily declining development densities, daily itineraries often become small odysseys, and modes of transportation that do not depend on the auto have been progressively disadvantaged.

The unintended consequences of these car-related changes in living patterns have ranged from the extinction of the paper boy in most urban areas to a national obesity rate (38 percent of adults) among the highest in the world. Welfare-to-work clients and people who cannot or should not drive often confront formidable transportation dilemmas, and the home-and-hearth images conjured up by the euphemism "homemaker" belie the tireless shuttling of soccer moms and kiddy carpool queens.

Briefly interrupting his hymn of automotive rapture to address pesky safety concerns, Mr. Wilson reassures us that motor-vehicle fatalities have continued to decline for years. In fact, the low point was reached in 1992; the annual toll has since increased steadily. By 1995, deaths were up 6 percent, injuries up 10 percent. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the fatality rate per vehicle mile has remained about the same; Americans are simply driving many more miles.

DWIGHT KINGSBURY
Tallahassee, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson's assault on those who see the downside of the automobile strikes me as extreme. To criticize the car culture is to question the car's dominance over our lives and landscape and the excesses of the auto age. It is to insist on a better way of life than taking a ton of rolling wheel and steel to buy a quart of milk. Despite Mr. Wilson's "Ah, Wilderness!" ode, only 8 percent of the miles we travel take us on the scenic idyll he describes. The commute accounts for 22 percent, while the bulk of our mileage goes for shopping and chauffeuring. Hardly joyrides.

Instead of facing the reality of our subservience to the automobile, Mr. Wilson trivializes the toll the car takes overall—120 fatalities a day, half our global warming, the destruction of the habitat—as well as the 40 hours a year each of us spends stuck in traffic, and the erosion of the quality of life and the community, which stems from the car-bred sprawl.

As for the failure of alternatives to the automobile: Mr. Wilson manages vastly to overstate the ills of public transportation. The odds of a transit strike are far below the chance of congestion, breakdowns, crashes. To call a society that spends seven times as much on highways as on mass transit "relentlessly" rail-minded is absurd. Highway subsidies undermine non-automated mobility—walking, biking, busing—as well as rail transportation.

We pay for the car with federal taxes and local property taxes; we subsidize its turf, the suburbs, with tax-deductible, single-family mortgages. The cost increases when we add incidentals like spending $100 billion a year, half our military budget, for oil interests in the Persian Gulf. Then factor in, if you will, the $6,500 a year per car in personal costs and the $4,000 on social and environmental ones.

By distorting the 100 pages in my book, *Asphalt Nation*, devoted to solutions, in which I detail how to achieve walkable main streets, flowering smaller cities, inner suburbs, rural areas, etc., and by demoniz-

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ing cities, Mr. Wilson sets up a strawman—or a straw high-rise city—as the only style of car-free living. Not so. Whatever the Southern California mentality, density comes in many forms, from the middle-income, three-decker to affluent North Beach or Georgetown housing.

"Imagine the country we now inhabit" without cars, Mr. Wilson observes. Imagine it with cars curbed, critics retort. Imagine Mr. Wilson's neighbors *not* needing to organize to fix an intersection; *not* needing to stop highway-funded sprawl. Imagine more creative and truly "neighborly" meetings. Imagine walking, trolleying, bicycling, ferrying, or shuttling and busing with good service. In return, this advocate of alternatives will imagine driving to view Southern California's splendors. But let's book our trip soon, Mr. Wilson: the hardtoppers are coming.

JANE HOLTZ KAY
Boston, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

While heading to Brooklyn via the subway, I was much diverted by James Q. Wilson's paean to the automobile. Among Mr. Wilson's more telling remarks is an idea put forth as merely parenthetical:

> A great failing of the intellectual life of this country is that so much of it is centered in Manhattan, where one finds the highest concentration of nondrivers in the country.

The shortcomings of Manhattan intellect aside, can we explain Manhattan's untoward influence by the fact that its thoughts arise from the ranks of nondrivers? The answer, I believe, is yes. Consider that if I had been *driving* to Brooklyn, I would have been able to read Mr. Wilson's article only during traffic jams, and even on the Brooklyn-Queens expressway these are not of sufficient duration to do justice to his thoughtful piece.

JAMES L. WUNSCH
Bronx, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

As an immigrant to the U.S. from Europe, I can attest firsthand to the expansion of opportunities the car affords. For those who do not live or work close to it, mass transit is inconvenient at best and impossible at worst.

But bus systems, although not mentioned in the article, could attract riders if existing regulations were removed. Most bus systems are incapable of responding to consumer demand because they are strictly controlled by local governments and frequently restricted to one provider who may be required to pay union wages.

Rather than subways, high-frequency minibus service by competitive providers is a more appropriate form of public transportation for today's far-flung neighborhoods. It is estimated that illegal minibuses carry 40,000 to 60,000 riders a day in the New York City area, where government regulation has made public transportation an oxymoron.

DIANA FURCHTGOTT-ROTH
American Enterprise Institute Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

I am not among those who "dislike everything the car stands for and everything that society constructs to serve the needs of its occupants." I am, rather, one of those libertarians to whom James Q. Wilson refers in the beginning of his article, and I am offended by his belief that the automobile is somehow a bastion of free-market devices. We as a nation can argue endlessly about the social benefits of automobiles (and we have so argued!), but the only way to determine the truth is to let people choose their mode of transportation in a free market.

I suggest that we relieve the government of its highway investment. We can start with the interstates and finish with state highways as soon as we can find buyers. If people were truly willing to pay the costs of their cars, they should be glad to be free of red tape and poor government management and should be happy to pay their way through tolls. If, for some reason, a buyer could not be found for a particular road, that would mean only that it should not have been built, since the cost of its maintenance exceeds what people are willing to pay to use it.

So let us begin as soon as possible. We will repeal the gas tax, thus freeing people to spend as much or as little on auto transport as they wish. If, however, we want to keep the gas tax and have some private company administer construction of roads, we must also allow all money which has been collected in taxes from railroads over the last 150 years to be spent constructing and maintaining rail rights-of-way. In addition, I assume that we will be removing our military from foreign lands so that we can pay the true market value for oil. Of course, private road owners would be expected to provide their own law enforcers and courts to handle speeding and accident claims.

Finally, I trust that we will begin charging for automobile pollution on a cost-mass basis. That is, if you emit x pounds of pollutants a year, you pay y dollars. This could easily be accomplished by selling pollution credits, which the government would auction off once and for all. After this, the trading of pollution credits would be governed only by the free market. In this way, companies could make reasonable decisions as to whether or not it is in their best interest to reduce their level of pollution. The same would be true for car owners.

The point of this exercise is to make it clear that the largest socialist program in the history of civilization—the construction of the American highway system—has caused significant damage to the freedom of individuals in this country.

JOEL HILTNER
Peoria, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson's excellent article suffers from one critical omission. Although he mentions the possibility of people driving "at different prices, depending on the level of congestion," he fails to point out that many of the problems associated with cars arise from the way governments run the roads. Poor pricing, congestion, neglect of maintenance, and indifference to consumer needs are typical of the "command economy" everywhere.

As an engineer and transport economist whose books include *Paying for the Roads: The Economics of Traffic Con-*

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An Open Letter to the Families of Holocaust Victims

In 1831, a group of Jewish merchants in what is now Italy founded a new insurance company called Assicurazioni Generali. During the first months of 1832, it opened offices in the major cities of the Hapsburg Empire in Central and Eastern Europe. Following the split-up of that Empire at the end of World War I, Generali continued its prominent role in the insurance industry in the newly independent countries which emerged.

During and after the dark years of World War II, Generali faced expropriations of its properties and the properties of its insureds. The racial laws of the Nazi and fascist era and the state action of Soviet-dominated regimes in Central and Eastern Europe severely damaged Generali's ability to do business there. The cold-war Communist regimes in Eastern Europe nationalized and expropriated all major businesses, seizing all of Generali's insurance businesses there, including its offices, 184 buildings and 14 companies controlled by Generali. As a result, Generali today has very little information and few records regarding policies issued by its former branches in Central and Eastern Europe.

Throughout the years, the company has had a long affiliation with the Jewish people. This relationship has been reflected in its history, from its founding of the Migdal insurance company in 1930's Jewish Palestine, to its recent $320 million investment in Israel to assume the majority position in Migdal, today the leading insurer in the Jewish State. In reaffirming its historic commitment, Generali has also announced its decision to establish a fund of $12 million, to be administered by an independent committee in Israel, in honor of Generali policyholders who perished in the Holocaust.

Fund monies will be given to organizations and public bodies dedicated to the eternalization of the memory of the Holocaust; to the assistance of Holocaust victims and their families through the provision of medical, psychological and other assistance; and may be applied by the independent committee for discretionary payments to those who held Generali policies issued before World War II in Central and Eastern Europe or their loved ones who survived them.

In addition, a Policy Information Center is being established to provide families of Holocaust victims with information in Generali's possession about Generali policies which may have been issued to their loved ones during the pre-war era. Generali is in the process of computerizing whatever information it does have regarding policies held during the war. Specialists at the Policy Information Center will work with individuals to process their requests for information. A search of Generali's archives in Trieste will be conducted and available policy data will be forwarded to the requesting families.

Data from the archives will also be provided to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem to support its ongoing efforts to compile the names of all Holocaust victims. In response to Generali's decision to take these steps, Knesset Members Rabbi Avraham Ravitz, Chairman of the Finance Committee; Michael Kleiner, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Insurance; and Avraham Hirschson, Subcommittee Chairman of the Committee for Restitution of Jewish Property, wrote to the company:

> *"We wish to confirm as most praiseworthy the establishment by you of a fund in Israel in memory of the people insured by Generali who perished in the Holocaust. We realize this to be a fulfillment of Generali's public obligation in memory of the Holocaust victims... We wish to welcome Generali's presence in Israel as a most welcome contribution to Israel's economy..."*

If you would like to request an archival search on behalf of a relative who was insured by Generali in Central or Eastern Europe prior to or during World War II, call or write to the Policy Information Center at:

1-800-456-8174

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In a visit to Israel this month, in meetings with President Weizman and Prime Minister Netanyahu, Generali Managing Director Gianfranco Gutty spoke of Generali feeling "committed to the memory of those of its insured in Central and East Europe who perished in the Holocaust." The Information Center and the decision to set up the $12 million fund are an expression of that feeling.

Respectfully,
ASSICURAZIONI GENERALI

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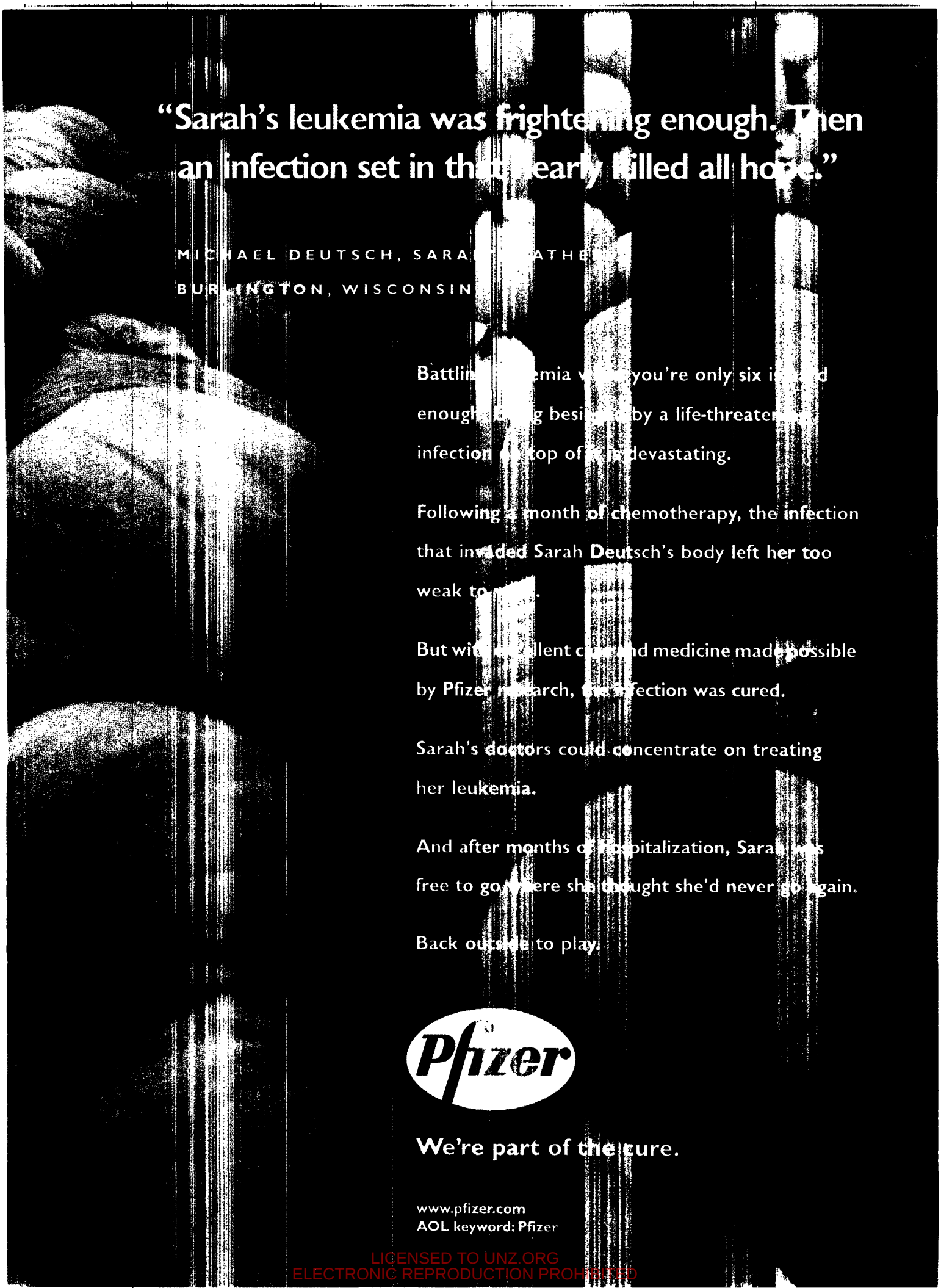

"Sarah's leukemia was frighte[illegible]ng enough. Then an infection set in th[illegible] nearly killed all hope."

MICHAEL DEUTSCH, SARA[illegible]ATHE[illegible]
BURLINGTON, WISCONSIN

Battlin[illegible]emia v[illegible] you're only six i[illegible]d enough[illegible]g besi[illegible]by a life-threater[illegible] infection [illegible]op of [illegible]devastating.

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gestion and Roads in a Market Economy, let me say that if roads were provided on a commercial basis, with prices reflecting costs and demand and investment based on profitability, many of the problems associated with cars would become more manageable.

GABRIEL ROTH
Chevy Chase, Maryland

JAMES Q. WILSON writes:

My central argument about cars is easily repeated: the great majority of people want one for perfectly understandable reasons. Though there are some external costs, such as pollution, for which they should help pay, a democratic government will supply the roads on which cars can operate and market-oriented builders will furnish the homes and offices that make car use especially convenient.

I think this is a rather modest statement of a nearly self-evident truth. Now look at how my critics respond. Paul S. Mansour calls me "paranoid" and is upset that the government has subsidized the car. (What else should it have done?) Sandy Smith complains that the "convenience, efficiency, and flexibility of the car" led builders to produce communities that can only be traversed by car. (What else were they supposed to do?) Mark Gauvreau Judge supplies an answer—revive "small-town planning." What is small-town planning? It must be a good thing, because Dwight Kingsbury thinks that cars are responsible for national obesity, the extinction of the paper boy, and the terrible burdens faced by soccer moms. And Jane Holtz Kay adds to this list (each item, of course, unsupported by facts): "half our global warming, the destruction of the habitat [and being] stuck in traffic." Oh, and we spend too much on "oil interests in the Persian Gulf." James L. Wunsch slyly notes that only because he was riding on a subway did he find the time to read my essay. Obviously, subways must be a great thing.

To all of them I can only repeat: what you want is not what people want, here or abroad. Jane Holtz Kay especially cannot lift her eyes to Europe to see what happens in nations that have massively taxed gasoline and heavily subsidized trains: the people there are buying and using cars in record numbers. Most of my critics believe in planning by experts. Fine. But in hoping for it, they should remember what real planners, as opposed to theoretical ones, actually do. Among other things, they ban, as Diana Furchtgott-Roth points out, market-oriented bus services, insisting instead that only "authorized" drivers with either monopoly bus routes or expensive taxi medallions can transport people for pay.

Joel Hiltner and Gabriel Roth have a different view. Let the market determine what roads will be built and how much drivers should pay to use them. There is much that is correct in their view, but I think Mr. Hiltner neglects a problem with his relentlessly libertarian approach: he wants to create a society in which only he and a few of his like-minded comrades could live. Private law enforcement? Private courts? No military stationed overseas? Perhaps he should discuss this with Jane Holtz Kay. Then they can vote.

And, Mr. Judge, my wife does not drive a minivan. Never has, never will.

American (and Israeli) Jews

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Judaism Without Limits" [July], Jack Wertheimer faults Conservative and Reform Jews in the U.S. for raising the issue of religious pluralism in Israel. Mr. Wertheimer attacks the "assumption" that "American Jews have much to teach their benighted Israeli cousins." For Mr. Wertheimer, since American Judaism is itself "in crisis," the chancellor of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary and the president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform) and their colleagues are unqualified to offer Israel guidance on religious life.

As the immediate past president of the Rabbinical Assembly (Conservative), let me say that the Conservative and Reform movements are not unaware of problems regarding Jewish continuity. Yet the lesson learned from American Judaism is that synagogue affiliation does make a difference in preserving Jewish identity. Over 80 percent of America's Jews join congregations at some point in their adult years, precisely because a range of Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform options is available.

As an example, let us point to the challenge posed by intermarriage. Yes, over half the recent American Jewish weddings have been intermarriages. Yet as documented in a new study by the Wilstein Institute and the American Jewish Committee, these alarming numbers are inflated by the nearly 75-percent out-marriage rate among unaffiliated Jewry. In contrast, in major metropolitan areas seven out of ten sons and daughters of synagogue members marry other Jews, even in the fourth and fifth generations. Synagogue membership makes a difference.

Should we not share this lesson from the American Jewish experience with our Israeli brothers and sisters? Consider the following facts about Israeli Jews:

- Three-quarters of Jewish children receive only the most minimal Jewish religious education.
- Unaffiliated Israelis are involved in low rates of voluntarism and of philanthropic giving.
- Israeli youth identify Judaism with negative stereotypes associated with ultra-Orthodoxy: draft dodgers, militant settlers, and corrupt politicians.
- Some secular Israelis no longer feel the need for close ties with world Jewry, or for preserving the Jewish nature of the state.
- Influential Israeli intellectuals today regard the Jewish religion as an "enemy" to be fought with vigor.
- Nonreligious Israelis sense an "absence of values," a spiritual crisis in their midst.

Seeing the positive results of synagogue membership in American Jewish life, we claim that the religious crisis in Israel would be lessened by increasing Israel's appallingly low 17-percent rate of synagogue

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affiliation. To that end, Masorti (Conservative) and Reform rabbis and congregations are necessary. After all, when offered Orthodox Judaism or nothing, most Israelis distance themselves entirely from the Jewish religious heritage.

In other words, the malaise within Israeli Judaism would be altered by the presence of synagogues serving as community centers, by rabbis armed with both Jewish and general-studies degrees, by less judgmental religious youth groups and camps, and by the spread of schools providing supplemental education in Judaism to secular Israeli youth.

American Jews do have some things to teach our Israeli cousins.

[RABBI] ALAN SILVERSTEIN
Congregation Agudath Israel
Caldwell, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Jack Wertheimer allows the myth of rigidity in Jewish law (*halakhah*) to continue unchallenged. As any scholar acquainted with *halakhic* sources should know, conversions conducted by Conservative rabbis in Israel are valid according to *halakhah*. (Most conversions conducted by Reform rabbis there are also valid, but the Reform movement is not always careful to stick to the rules.)

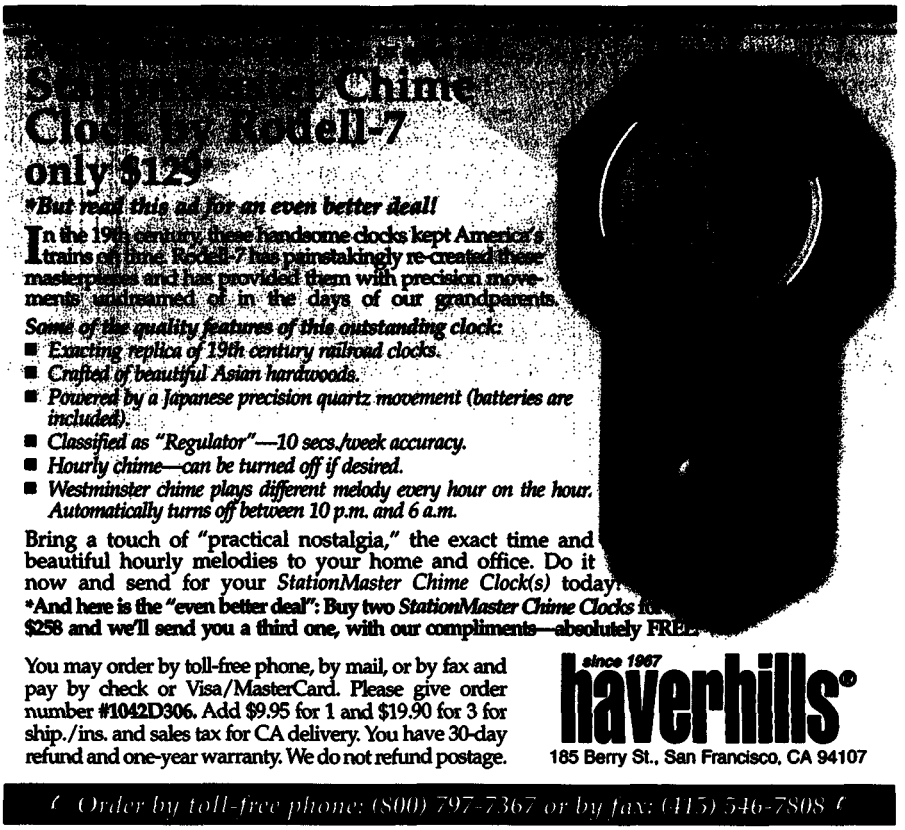
We need to understand the laws of conversion to recognize the validity of these conversions. The definitive 16th-century legal code, *Shulhan Arukh*, states that conversion involves three rites, all of which should occur in front of three scholars who have the authority to act as judges: (1) informing the convert (male or female) of *mitzvot* (*halakhic* commandments); (2) circumcision (for a male); and (3) total immersion (for a male or female convert). The tradition also urges that when the rabbinic court of three explains the *mitzvot* "they neither overwhelm [the convert] with information nor go into great detail." The Talmud notes that proselytes normally did not know the *mitzvot* in the way that a born Jew knew them.

In his article, Mr. Wertheimer states that, traditionally, conversion to Judaism was preceded by "a term of study leading to a commitment to Jewish religious observance and an identification with the Jewish people." Actually, this term of study is a relatively modern phenomenon. During the talmudic era there were repeated instances of converts who misunderstood Jewish laws and customs or converted for the wrong reasons, yet the conversions were still recognized as valid.

Despite this historic flexibility, the Orthodox community now claims that every detail of the system of *mitzvot* must be accepted. Many Orthodox authorities quote a rabbinic statement: "A proselyte who states that he will accept all the Torah except for one matter is not to be accepted." A contextual analysis of this quotation, however, shows that it applies to a proselyte who openly tells the court that he is going to pick and choose which parts of Judaism he will accept. But if the convert does not follow certain details merely because he does not know them, or because he follows a different rabbinic tradition, or because he follows the practices of the larger Jewish community, this is not deliberate rejection, and thus cannot be the basis for repudiating the validity of the conversion rite.

The Orthodox leadership in Israel and the Union of Orthodox Rabbis in America disregard the traditional flexibility of the *mitzvah* system, and instead demand acceptance of every commandment and of every rabbinic interpretation of such commandments, both before and after conversion. Their rigidity is ossifying Jewish tradition, turning *mitzvot*—the means of communicating with God with our whole being—into stumbling blocks which they place before potential converts.

[RABBI] H.D. URIEL SMITH
Lexington, Kentucky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TO THE EDITOR:

Jack Wertheimer presents, as always, a well-argued and trenchant case. As a BUJU (Buddhist Jew) myself, I think his comments on prostration to the Buddha as a form of *avodah zarah*, pagan worship, deserve serious consideration.

I was a little mystified by the end of the article, however. Having shown how utterly tangled is the whole situation on issues like conversion, he ends with a ringing call for clear, bright lines. Who would have the authority to draw such lines, and where could they possibly be drawn? Mr. Wertheimer does not give easy-to-read hints on these questions. Indeed, given the complexities he describes, it would seem only a miracle could provide the answers.

I found an element missing in Mr. Wertheimer's account, as in much of the debate on these issues—a sense of what Judaism is for. He seems preoccupied with Judaism's role in supplying the social solidarity necessary for survival in a harsh world. Of course here he is entirely right. The history of the Jewish people shows nothing more clearly than this. Yet to regard these imperatives as paramount would be doing an injustice to Judaism, whose controlling, most important goal is surely to provide its adherents with a sense of closeness to God.

Most of us know when we are closer than usual to God: when we feel overwhelmed by gratitude for existence and all that makes it possible, after recovering from a serious illness, for example, or witnessing the birth of a baby. Judaism exists to suffuse all life with this joy, which most people feel and continually long for. The effort of serious people to animate Judaism with this joyful quest should be applauded, both because it is a return to authentic Jewish roots and because it is the key to the positive vitality of the Jewish religion.

SIDNEY KEITH
San Francisco, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Jack Wertheimer would do well to consider the question of whether Jews exist to serve Judaism or Judaism exists to serve the Jews. Only by deciding that Jews exist to serve Judaism can one conclude that change is inappropriate and that non-Orthodox versions of the religion are illegitimate.

I am convinced that Judaism as we have known it since the destruction of the Second Temple was intended to preserve an identifiably Jewish people until such time as it could reestablish the Jewish commonwealth.

The establishment of the state of Israel changed the objective circumstances underlying what being Jewish meant. Contrary to what Mr. Wertheimer implies, assimilation, intermarriage, and conversion to other faiths are not serious problems for secular Jews living in Israel. Instead, the principal threat to their identity as Jews has been the cynicism generated by the activities of the ultra-Orthodox (*haredim*) and of the Israeli rabbinate. For example, Orthodox leaders express dismay at the lack of Jewish observance outside their own circles, yet *haredim* attack Reform and Conservative Jews who attempt to pray at the Western Wall. The Israeli rabbinate wants control over conversions, for religious reasons it is claimed, but then there is a scandal over bribery. I would be interested to know whether Mr. Wertheimer believes a conversion obtained by bribing an Orthodox rabbi is more legitimate than a sincere one obtained through the Reform procedure.

For American Jews, what is needed after the establishment of Israel is a reexamination of the core belief of Judaism. What is it that makes it valuable? People for whom the ritual trappings are not enough will be dissatisfied by a religion that cannot answer this question. Because Judaism has traditionally discouraged conversion, it has had little need to engage in introspection. But if Judaism were more open to conversion, we would have to know why others should even consider becoming Jews.

By opening themselves to outsiders, Reform and Conservative Judaism may be taking the first halting steps toward getting to the heart of the Jewish problem in America. Seeking a solution, they might just find one, and thus demonstrate that they, rather than the Orthodox, are better able to clarify what Judaism requires.

YALE M. ZUSSMAN
Quincy, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Jack Wertheimer asserts that by blurring the boundaries between Judaism and some form of non-Jewish religion, we are traveling the path not to pluralism but to "anarchy and self-extinction."

"Fuzzy boundaries" are no threat to the survival of Judaism. After all, there have always been different Jewish sects, each claiming a monopoly on truth in the name of God and the Five Books of Moses, including the Essenes and the early followers of Jesus, whose descendants and proselytes would today never think of considering themselves Jews. Indeed, "fuzzy boundaries" may be one of the reasons Judaism has survived through many centuries of strife and persecution.

What will survive as Judaism in the future remains to be seen. Although I personally am far from Orthodox, I would maintain that the most observant strains have the best chance, not necessarily because what they believe is "right," but because, when it comes to religion or a way of life, what ultimately counts is whether one's descendants preserve the traditions and practice them.

The fact that some of us choose not to observe all the Jewish laws and rituals does not mean that we are not Jews. But if we do not care enough to educate ourselves, and more importantly hope to make Judaism an integral part of our lives, we cannot expect our brand of Judaism to survive.

ILLANA D. LEISER
Elmira, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Jack Wertheimer's "Judaism Without Limits" reinforces the inherent wisdom of the ancient rabbinic dictum, "Make a fence around the Torah," a principle of Jewish law in which "fortifications" are strategically placed around specific commandments to make them more demanding and more stringent. In this way, their continued observance is assured.

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In contrast to this approach, modern religious innovators have often gone in the reverse direction, guided, seemingly, by the principle that the less there is to be observed, the more will be observed. In an effort to foster Sabbath observance, for example, more and more prohibited forms of work have been declared permissible. Similarly, the intermarriage problem is being wished away by reclassifying those who were traditionally never considered Jews as full-fledged members of the Jewish people. The problem is resolved by magically transforming Gentiles into Jews.

I suspect that the effort to preserve the sanctity and uniqueness of the Jewish people will meet with the same success as the effort to preserve the sanctity and uniqueness of the Sabbath.

NORMAN A. BLOOM
North Miami Beach, Florida

JACK WERTHEIMER writes:

One would never guess from Rabbi Alan Silverstein's letter, which deals almost exclusively with the weaknesses he perceives in Israeli Judaism, that my article was about the anarchy of Jewish religious life in America. It may well be that Israeli society would benefit by adopting some programs that work in the American Jewish setting. I, for one, would welcome the implementation of each point enumerated in Rabbi Silverstein's penultimate paragraph. It is debatable, however, whether Israeli society is ready to accept them. Nor is it likely that American Jews will get much attention in Israel if they remain tone-deaf to the differences between the two countries.

For example, there are many good purposes to be served by participation in synagogue life in Israel, but inoculation against intermarriage is not one of them; the rate of intermarriage, even among the most secular Israelis, is infinitesimal. Voluntarism and philanthropic giving, to take two other items on Rabbi Silverstein's bill of particulars, have distinct meanings in the American setting that may be expressed very differently by Israelis. And to speak of synagogue "affiliation" in Israel makes little sense in the context of a society where most synagogues are constructed and maintained by the government.

Rabbi Silverstein's silence about the actual theme of my article is disappointing. I did not write it because I believe that a "miracle" (Sidney Keith's word) is needed to rescue us from the crisis we find ourselves in as a result of the unfettered pluralism of American Judaism. Rather, I believe we can work toward a consensus to reverse the "anything-goes" approach, and I know many rabbis in each of the major movements who share my dismay at the present state of affairs.

Rabbi H.D. Uriel Smith presents a one-sided critique of Orthodox leaders. I share his understanding of rabbinic Judaism as a flexible legal system, but am baffled by his indifference to those sectors of the Jewish community that reject or ignore the conversion procedure *in its entirety*. Where Rabbi Smith laments the stumbling blocks some rabbis place before potential converts, I worry more about the confusion sown among born Jews by rabbis who pay scant attention to "the rules" in so many areas of Jewish life.

I am gratified to learn that Sidney Keith, a self-professed BUJU, feels that my comments about the pagan aspects of Buddhist worship "deserve serious consideration." Unfortunately, the rest of his letter suggests that he himself has yet to give serious consideration to Judaism. According to him, Judaism's "most important, controlling goal is to provide . . . a sense of closeness to God." Even if one were to grant the truth of this proposition (as I do not), it is still the case that Judaism seeks to achieve such fulfillment by prescribing a very specific path that is a different thing from the "joyful quest" Mr. Keith advocates. Indeed, if Jews were to give priority to the feelings he values, they would succeed only in losing more people to other religions.

Yale M. Zussman regards traditional Judaism as a kind of formaldehyde that preserved the Jewish people in exile but is no longer necessary now that the Jews have their own state. This view is consistent with a long line of Zionist thinking that is currently being challenged by secular Israelis themselves, some of whom feel that traditional Judaism may have something to say to them. I have no idea why Mr. Zussman imagines me to be a defender of every act performed by an Orthodox Jew, no matter how unethical, or why he regards me as opposed to all steps taken by Conservative and Reform Judaism. But I reject his contention that Judaism "had little need to engage in introspection" in the past, and I regard my article as a goad to further introspection about matters Mr. Zussman apparently does not wish to consider.

Illana D. Leiser invokes 1st-century Judaism to justify the anarchy of American Jewish religious life nearly two millennia later. I often encounter Jews who draw this historical analogy, but have never grasped why it makes them feel better. How can the schisms among Jews living in their own land so long ago serve as a guide for American Jews today? But I certainly do agree with her concluding sentence. And I agree as well with Norman A. Bloom that there is a delusory quality to some of our current strategies for coping with the very serious problems facing the American Jewish community.

Albert Shanker

TO THE EDITOR:

Arch Puddington's excellent article, "Missing Albert Shanker" [July], captured much of the loss felt by many of us who knew and worked with Al. He was a giant of a man. But one aspect of his life was overlooked, namely, his work abroad. He had a passion for democracy and human rights and used his office as president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to support dissidents in dictatorial countries and to educate his own union members about the threat posed by Communism and the Soviet Union.

In the late 1980's, as chairman of the AFL-CIO's

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international-affairs department, Shanker was sent to represent the labor federation at two events held in Poland: the commemoration of the deaths of Viktor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich, two leaders of the Jewish socialist Bund who were murdered by Stalin as they fled Hitler's troops, and the International Human Rights Conference organized by Solidarity. I was privileged to accompany him on both occasions.

The first meeting was organized in the fall of 1988 by Marek Edelman, a veteran of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and a respected elder of Solidarity. He was joined by a number of other Solidarity notables. After the ceremony at Warsaw's Jewish cemetery, at which Shanker spoke, he went to a post-ceremony gathering. Meeting Edelman properly for the first time, he immediately struck up a conversation in Yiddish. Though he rarely spoke of his own roots in Jewish terms, they were essential to his being.

The International Human Rights Conference, also held in 1988, in nearby Krakow, was the first time democratic activists throughout the Communist bloc (from as far away as Mongolia) came together in the same forum to press for their common agenda for human rights and an end to Communism. It was a remarkable event for anti-Communists, although it was largely ignored in the West. For Shanker, who often said that travel had two aims—shopping and anti-Communism—there was no greater achievement.

He met with dissidents and the leaders of free teachers' unions to work out how he and the AFT could best help them. But he was even more effective in teaching these union leaders, many of whom would later be thrust into leading positions in their governments, about what worked and what did not work in education, what was still of value in the pragmatic tradition and what had turned out to be just an educational fad, or, worse, a bastardization of democratic principles.

Indeed, Albert Shanker was looked up to more in other countries than here (at least until the last years of his life, when his ideas became the centerpiece of Bill Clinton's own education program). Over three decades, ministers of education from all continents and from all nations sought meetings with him.

We mourn the passing not only of "old" liberalism's last lion but also of international labor's last great statesman.

ERIC CHENOWETH
Washington, D.C.

ARCH PUDDINGTON writes:

My article dealt with Albert Shanker's career in American education, so I am grateful to Eric Chenoweth for his comments on the vital role Shanker played internationally.

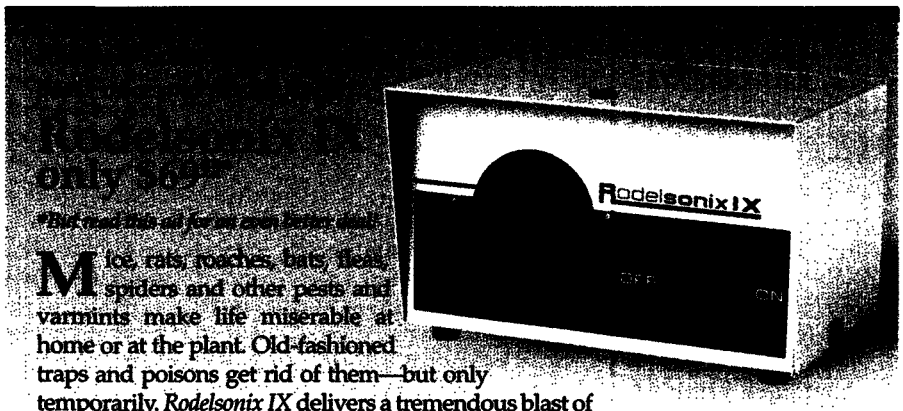
The Forward

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Abraham Cahan, the 'Forward,' and Me" [June], Seth Lipsky makes some interesting personal observations which call for emendation, rebuttal, and a restoration of the historical record.

To begin with, the differences between Abraham Cahan, the editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, and Baruch Charney Vladeck, the paper's business manager, were not because Vladeck's "politics were quite a bit to the Left of Cahan's," as Mr. Lipsky was told. The tension between the two men was largely a result of Cahan's imperiousness as editor and his avoidance of activism outside the *Forward*.

Vladeck's activities included the founding (with David Dubinsky, president of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union) of the Jewish Labor Committee, which urged the Roosevelt administration to recognize the unfolding horror of Hitler's "Final Solution" and was involved in rescuing Jewish workers, trade-unionists, social-de-



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mocratic leaders, and intellectuals from the Nazis.

Vladeck served on the New York City Council, where he successfully fought for low-cost public housing. He was also deeply supportive of Yiddish and its culture and was part and parcel of the trade-union movement, the Workmen's Circle/ *Arbeter Ring* (of which I am past president), and of social-democratic political action. Basically, however, there were no ideological differences between Vladeck and Cahan. Both men were "old-guard" socialists who eventually came to support Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

The *Forward* was founded in 1897 by a group of Jewish socialists who had broken with the Socialist Labor party that was then run dictatorially by Daniel De Leon and joined the newly formed Socialist party of Eugene Victor Debs, Morris Hillquit, Meyer London, and Victor Berger. The *Forward* consistently supported Socialist-party candidates for office and in the 1926 and 1928 presidential elections it backed Norman Thomas. But in 1936 the paper endorsed Roosevelt for President. The rationale for this change was that the New Deal (and later Truman's Fair Deal) incorporated the basic socialist program: Social Security, public works, low-cost public housing, unemployment insurance, collective bargaining, etc.

The reason Cahan left the paper for five years was that he felt the *Forward* should not simply be a vehicle for the narrow ideological debate with De Leon's forces, but a people's paper with a broad social-democratic outlook.

As a member of the Forward Association, I have recognized the positive changes in the *Forward* under Mr. Lipsky's editorship, particularly in its sections on art and culture. But in spite of the fact that Mr. Lipsky is an able journalist, if he persists in his neoconservative course, I do not see how he can succeed as the editor of the *Forward*. Such neoconservative positions as opposition to universal health care and support for the privatization of Social Security, vouchers for private schools, and the abolition of an income tax based on the ability to pay are antithetical to the basic outlook of the *Forward* as a progressive social-democratic newspaper for the American Jewish people.

Mr. Lipsky has selectively quoted a few editorials in trying to show that he is a worthy successor to Cahan, but I have studied Cahan's entire record, and, unfortunately, Seth Lipsky is not Abraham Cahan.

ISRAEL KUGLER
Putnam Valley, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Seth Lipsky would have us believe that he not only inherited Abraham Cahan's position, but that he shares Cahan's values and is carrying on his tradition.

In his article, Mr. Lipsky relates an incident in which an old-time *Forward* staffer who was visiting the paper described how Cahan would

> sit in his office with the door open, and when he heard the name of someone he disliked, he would come barreling out, shake his fist in the air, and bellow, "He's a Communist! He's a Communist!"

Mr. Lipsky then goes on to tell us that the very same day he heard this story he himself, on seeing a copy of a book by Carl Sagan on a staffer's desk, had burst out, "What's that doing here? . . . He's a Communist."

What Mr. Lipsky does not consider in drawing the reader's attention to the similarity of these two episodes is that there were and remain two distinct and often antagonistic tendencies in the anti-Communist movement. One is conservative anti-Communism, the other is the anti-Communism of the anti-Stalinist Left.

To cite some of the differences in these two outlooks: one supported government sanctions against the Soviet Union, the other felt such actions were self-defeating. One backed the war in Vietnam, the other felt that the domino theory, which held that the Vietcong posed a threat to Southeast Asia, was simply not true. One saw in Ronald Reagan the most effective head of state in the anti-Communist struggle, the other looked to Willy Brandt.

In the world of ideas, Irving Kristol is the spokesman for the neoconservatives; for the Left, the ideas of George Orwell serve as inspiration.

MILTON ZATINSKY
Miami, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

I did not know Abraham Cahan personally, but as a little boy, I did meet him once. I was introduced to Cahan in the Garden cafeteria, next to the Forward Building on East Broadway, by Rose Asch Simpson, my grandmother. She headed the Workmen's Circle cemetery department for almost 50 years (and established its social-service department) and knew Cahan well; she was, in fact, responsible for creating the pantheon to honor Yiddish writers at Mount Carmel cemetery, where Cahan would himself be buried.

I cannot, therefore, claim as a matter of personal knowledge that Cahan's views have been distorted by Seth Lipsky in his article. But I believe that Mr. Lipsky's selective quotations from the *Forward* give the lie to his remarkable suggestion that there is a direct intellectual link from the Yiddish *Forward* edited by Cahan, to the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, to Mr. Lipsky's English-language version of the *Forward*.

To give but one example, Mr. Lipsky tries to place Cahan's blessing on the interventionist Vietnam policy lauded, after the fact, by Ronald Reagan, Mr. Lipsky's idol. Apart from the fact that Cahan died years before there was any U.S. intervention in Vietnam, the implausibility of Mr. Lipsky's effort in this regard is best shown by the fragments he proffers as evidence: a 1964 editorial supporting the Gulf of Tonkin resolution and a 1975 editorial expressing regret at the bloodbath likely to follow the Communist victory.

As virtually everybody now knows, the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was a nasty, dishonest piece of business, engineered by an American administration fully prepared to mislead both Congress and the American people. It is hardly a legitimate testament of support for the tragic and unsuccessful escalation of American in-

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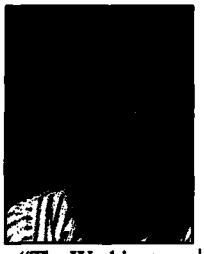

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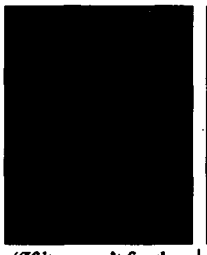

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volvement which came a few years later.

As for the second piece Mr. Lipsky cites, it is unremarkable in its recognition that an authoritarian and even totalitarian regime such as that of North Vietnam was quite likely to wreak savage revenge on those whom it considered its enemies, and to cause immense suffering to untold innocents in the process.

Mr. Lipsky's citation of these two positions espoused, a decade apart, by the *Forward*, in both cases years after Cahan's death, is hardly adequate rebuttal to Jack Sheinkman's contention that Mr. Lipsky's enthusiasm for the American misadventure in Vietnam is not true to the traditions of the newspaper.

DAVID B. SIMPSON
Tenafly, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Rarely have I enjoyed an article as much as I did Seth Lipsky's on the spirit of Abraham Cahan.

My parents were only marginally political, but they were very sympathetic to Labor Zionism. After my mother heard Vladimir Jabotinsky speak in Vienna in 1937, both she and my father felt no contradiction between the two different schools of Zionism. For them, anything and anyone promoting a Jewish homeland was worthy of respect.

When we came to the U.S. after the *Anschluss*, my parents became devoted readers of the *Forward*. A typical immigrant child of immigrant parents, I was intolerant of my parents' continued reading in Yiddish and, as a budding Marxist, sneered at their sycophantic adulation of what to me was the fractious legacy of Abraham Cahan.

Today, I am a subscriber to the *Forward* Mr. Lipsky edits and I am delighted by almost every feature and article in the paper, although I find its editorials much too often to the Left of my own neoconservatism. But I have become a *Forward*-ian.

JUDITH HIRSCH
Boca Raton, Florida

SETH LIPSKY writes:

Israel Kugler is right that one source of the tension between Abraham Cahan and Baruch Charney Vladeck was personal, though my own conversations at the *Forward* and my reading of the paper's history suggest to me that there was a degree of political conflict as well.

Mr. Kugler and I do not disagree on the question of whether I am Abraham Cahan. The fact that I am not, however, does not in the least diminish the thrill I felt in discovering just how magnificent were the editorials published in the *Forward* during Cahan's tenure and in later years by those following the path he had set.

Milton Zatinsky's suggestion that there were two different tendencies in the anti-Communist movement fails to solve the question of which one Abraham Cahan belonged to. I urge Mr. Zatinsky to go back and read the paper's editorials both during Cahan's time and in the years of his successors. They certainly strike me as embodying what might be called the hardline tendency; looked at today, with the benefit of hindsight, they hold up better than most.

As to the question of Vietnam, it is hard to find ambiguity in the editorials I cited. The paper's support of the Tonkin Gulf resolution was not passive, it was enthusiastic. With the fall of free Vietnam, the *Forward*, in contrast to quite a few other newspapers of the day, foresaw clearly the nightmare of killing that would engulf Indochina.

As our editorial in the English-language *Forward* honoring the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Yiddish paper put it:

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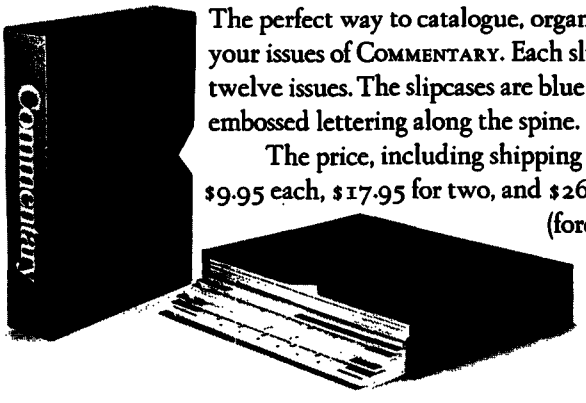

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record than that written by the *Forward* in Yiddish. The *New York Times* may have grasped events at Munich, but it waffled in the showdown with the Soviet Communist empire. The *Wall Street Journal* may have been heroic in the showdown with the Soviet regime, but it waffled at Munich. The *Forward* went into both wars with a clarity of vision that is breathtaking and a stamina that is astounding.

So, while I have never claimed to be Abraham Cahan, or even his heir, I do not feel disqualified from writing an article about my admiration for him and for the journalism he produced. It is remarkable to me, moreover, to see how inspiring Cahan's record is to the many younger editors and writers—and readers, among whom I am glad to include Judith Hirsch—who are rallying to the *Forward* in English.

Muhammad Ali

TO THE EDITOR:

Jonah Goldberg's "Politics and Pugilists" [June] is a penetrating meditation on the "Rumble in the Jungle" between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman depicted in the movie *When We Were Kings*. The facts I present below may further bolster Mr. Goldberg's thesis.

Muhammad Ali paid a huge price in both financial and emotional terms for joining the Nation of Islam (NOI) in 1964. As we now know from Claude A. Clegg III's fine new biography, *An Original Man: the Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad*, Ali was originally recruited into the movement by Malcolm X. Elijah Muhammad, the autocratic ruler of the Nation of Islam, disliked the young fighter for being a loudmouth braggart. Elijah was also unhappy that Clay was a friend of Malcolm X, Elijah's rival and critic. But after Ali's stunning upset victory over Sonny Liston in 1964, Elijah Muhammad opportunistically enlisted the fighter to be, as Clegg puts it, "the perfect poster boy" for the Nation of Islam.

Ali was ordered to make Herbert Muhammad, Elijah's son, manager of his finances in 1966. The twelve white Louisville, Kentucky, businessmen who had managed Clay-Ali in syndication sought revenge by having his draft status changed to 1A in 1967. The Selective Service sought a deal, but Elijah Muhammad ordered Ali to stand firm and demand conscientious-objector (CO) status. As Mr. Goldberg observes, Ali refused to wriggle to preserve his "political viability." The draft board denied him a CO classification and Ali was convicted in federal court and sentenced to a five-year prison term. He thereby lost his fighting license. Ali appealed the decision in the federal courts and in 1970 the Supreme Court struck down his conviction.

Elijah Muhammad shunned Ali in the wilderness years and even expelled him for a year in April 1969. But after the Supreme Court decision, he picked up his poster-boy's option again. Incidentally, another supreme opportunist, the late Mayor Richard M. Daley, Sr., of Chicago, enjoyed cordial relations with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. Daley actually proclaimed March 29, 1974 as "Honorable Elijah Muhammad Day" in Chicago.

Elijah Muhammad died in February 1975 and willed his kingdom to his rebellious son, Wallace Muhammad, rather than to the other heir apparent, Louis Farrakhan. Ali strongly supported Wallace's immediately enacted policy of rejoining Sunni Islam and jettisoning the NOI's race hatred, subordination of women, and thuggish security detail, the Fruit of Islam.

In describing the career of George Foreman, Ali's adversary in the Rumble in the Jungle, Mr. Goldberg tells us that Foreman was bewildered by the fact that he was treated so shabbily after his patriotic witness at the 1968 Olympics. "Patriotism," as George Santayana famously defined it, "is piety for the sources of one's being." By that definition, the late 1960's in the U.S., especially 1967 and 1968, were antithetical to patriotism. Blaspheming the sources of one's being was the fashion at that time. This was probably even more true of well-off white Americans, and especially of the intellectual elite, than of struggling black Americans. In that demoralized political and intellectual climate, Foreman's old-fashioned fortitude and gratitude were anathema.

Let us now honor both George Foreman and Muhammad Ali for having overcome their bitterness, and for their patriotism.

CHRISTOPHER M. GRAY
Falls Church, Virginia

JONAH GOLDBERG writes:

My thanks to Christopher M. Gray for his kind words and his insights. Among other things—and leaving Mike Tyson's recent peckishness aside—Mr. Gray further demonstrates that boxing, though at a new low, has not sunk very far from where it was three decades ago.

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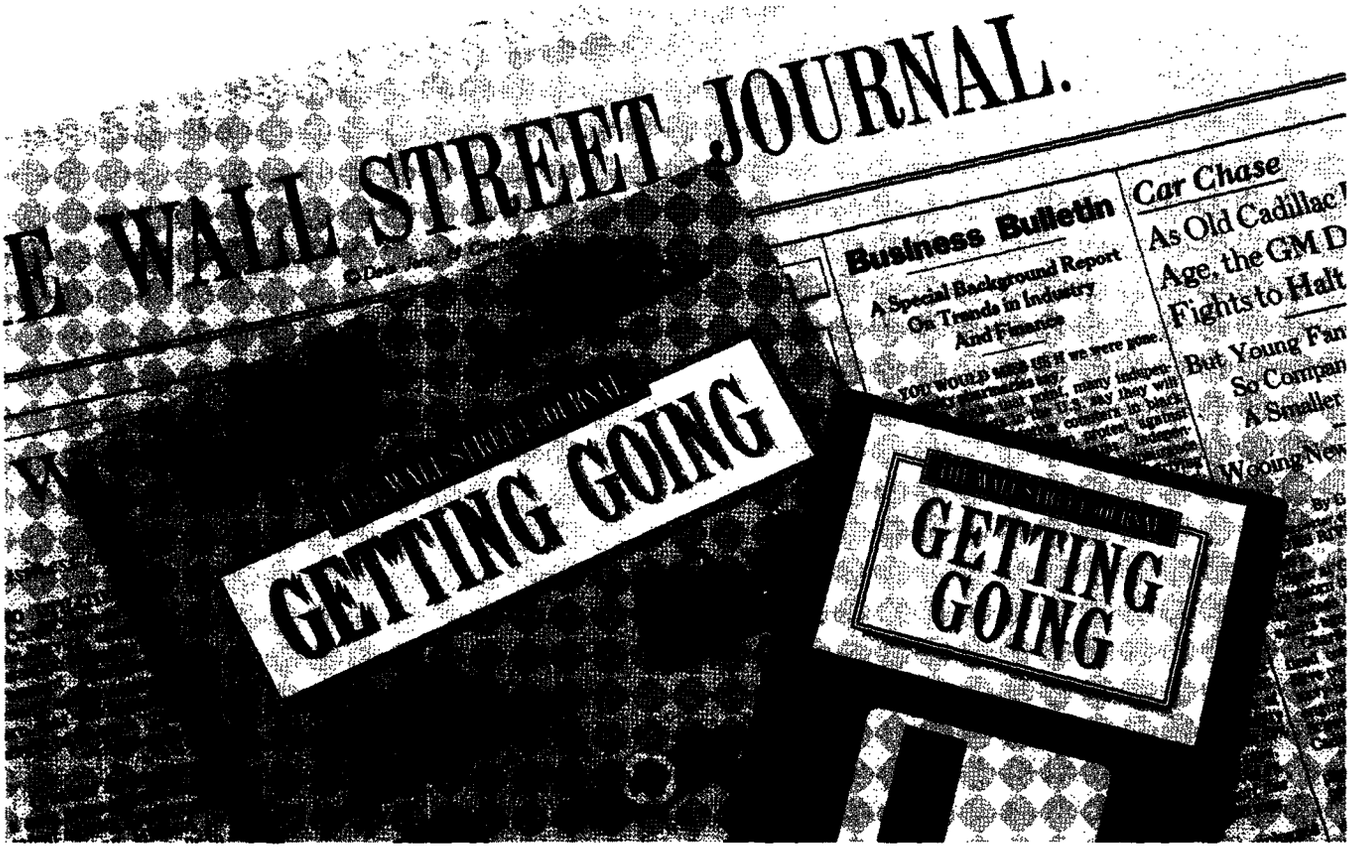

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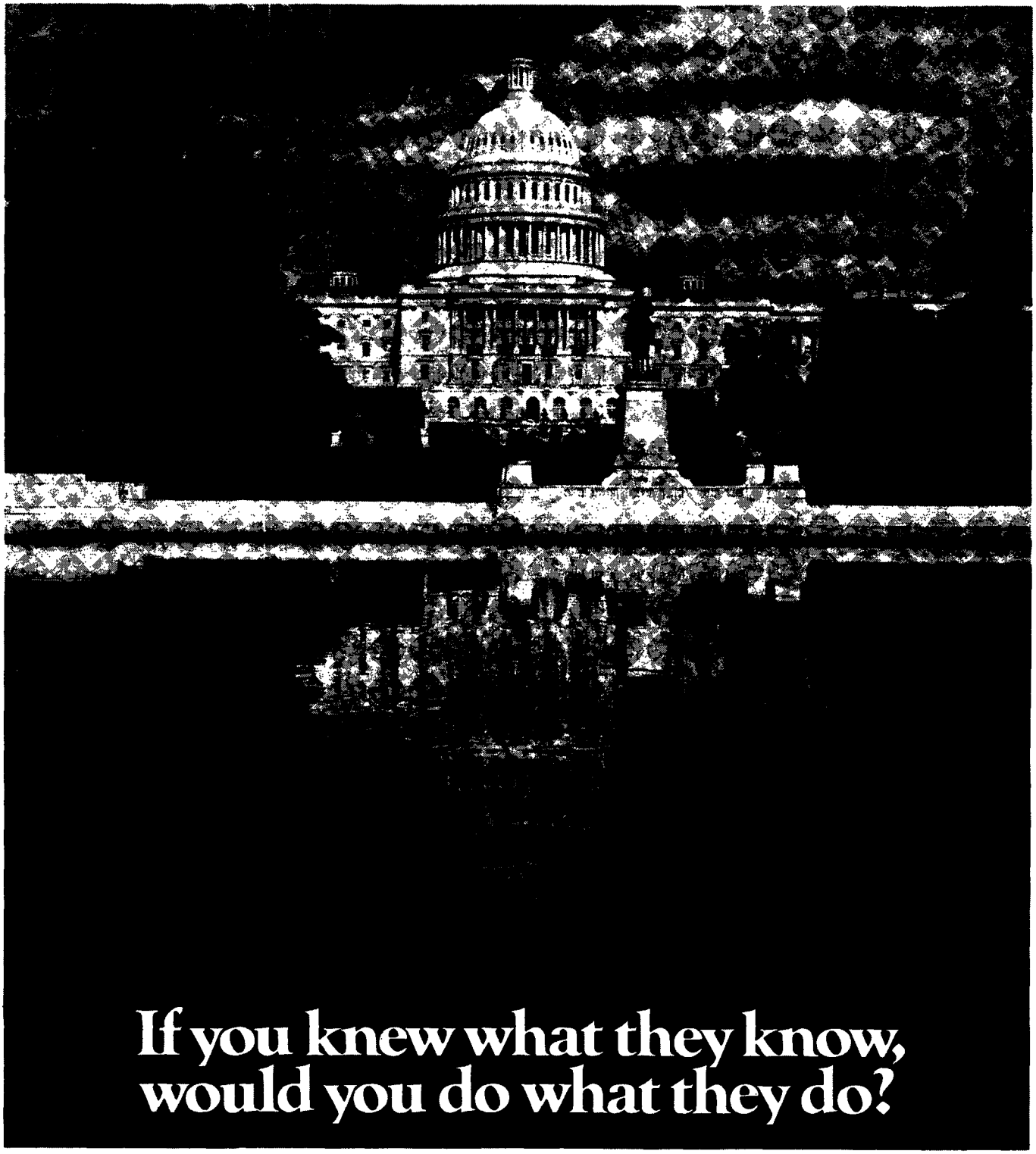

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Commentary
October 1997

The New Wealth of Nations

Christopher C. DeMuth

THE NATIONS of North America, Western Europe, Australia, and Japan are wealthier today than they have ever been, wealthier than any others on the planet, wealthier by far than any societies in human history. Yet their governments appear to be impoverished—saddled with large accumulated debts and facing annual deficits that will grow explosively over the coming decades. As a result, government spending programs, especially the big social-insurance programs like Social Security and Medicare in the United States, are facing drastic cuts in order to avert looming insolvency (and, in France and some other European nations, in order to meet the Maastricht treaty's criteria of fiscal rectitude). American politics has been dominated for several years now by contentious negotiations over deficit reduction between the Clinton administration and the Republican Congress. This past June, first at the European Community summit in Amsterdam and then at the Group of Eight meeting in Denver, most of the talk was of hardship and constraint and the need for governmental austerity ("Economic Unease Looms Over Talks at Denver Summit," read the *New York Times* headline).

These bloodless problems of governmental accounting are said, moreover, to reflect real social ills: growing economic inequality in the United States; high unemployment in Europe; an aging, burdensome, and medically needy population everywhere; and the globalization of commerce, which is destroying jobs and national autonomy and forcing bitter measures to keep up with the bruising demands of international competitiveness.

How can it be that societies so surpassingly wealthy have governments whose core domestic-welfare programs are on the verge of bankruptcy? The answer is as paradoxical as the question. We have become not only the richest but also the freest and most egalitarian societies that have ever existed, and it is our very wealth, freedom, and equality that are causing the welfare state to unravel.

II

THAT WE have become very rich is clear enough in the aggregate. That we have become very equal in the enjoyment of our riches is an idea strongly resisted by many. Certainly there has been a profusion of reports in the media and political speeches about increasing income inequality: the rich, it is said, are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and the middle and working classes are under the relentless pressure of disappearing jobs in manufacturing and middle management.

Although these claims have been greatly exaggerated, and some have been disproved by events, it is true that, by some measures, there has been a

CHRISTOPHER C. DEMUTH *is president of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.*

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recent increase in income inequality in the United States. But it is a very small tick in the massive and unprecedented leveling of material circumstances that has been proceeding now for almost three centuries and in this century has accelerated dramatically. In fact, the much-noticed increase in measured-income inequality is in part a result of the increase in real social equality. Here are a few pieces of this important but neglected story.

• First, progress in agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and other key sectors of economic production has made the material necessities of life—food, shelter, and clothing—available to essentially everyone. To be sure, many people, including the seriously handicapped and the mentally incompetent, remain dependent on the public purse for their necessities. And many people continue to live in terrible squalor. But the problem of poverty, defined as material scarcity, has been solved. If poverty today remains a serious problem, it is a problem of individual behavior, social organization, and public policy. This was not so 50 years ago, or ever before.

• Second, progress in public health, in nutrition, and in the biological sciences and medical arts has produced dramatic improvements in longevity, health, and physical well-being. Many of these improvements—resulting, for example, from better public sanitation and water supplies, the conquest of dread diseases, and the abundance of nutritious food—have affected entire populations, producing an equalization of real personal welfare more powerful than any government redistribution of income.

The Nobel prize-winning economist Robert Fogel has focused on our improved mastery of the biological environment—leading over the past 300 years to a doubling of the average human life span and to large gains in physical stature, strength, and energy—as the key to what he calls "the egalitarian revolution of the 20th century."* He considers this so profound an advance as to constitute a distinct new level of human evolution. Gains in stature, health, and longevity are continuing today and even accelerating. Their outward effects may be observed, in evolutionary fast-forward, in the booming nations of Asia (where, for example, the physical difference between older and younger South Koreans is strikingly evident on the streets of Seoul).

• Third, the critical *source* of social wealth has shifted over the last few hundred years from land (at the end of the 18th century) to physical capital (at the end of the 19th) to, today, human capital—education and cognitive ability. This development is not an unmixed gain from the standpoint of economic equality. The ability to acquire and deploy human capital is a function of intelligence, and intelligence is not only unequally distributed but also, to a significant degree, heritable. As Charles Murray and the late Richard J. Herrnstein argue in *The Bell Curve*, an economy that rewards sheer brainpower replaces one old source of inequality, socioeconomic advantage, with a new one, cognitive advantage.

BUT AN economy that rewards human capital also tears down far more artificial barriers than it erects. For most people who inhabit the vast middle range of the bell curve, intelligence is much more equally distributed than land or physical capital ever was. Most people, that is, possess ample intelligence to pursue all but a handful of specialized callings. If in the past many were held back by lack of education and closed social institutions, the opportunities to use one's human capital have blossomed with the advent of universal education and the erosion of social barriers.

Furthermore, the material benefits of the knowledge-based economy are by no means limited to those whom Murray and Herrnstein call the cognitive elite. Many of the newest industries, from fast food to finance to communications, have succeeded in part by opening up employment opportunities for those of modest ability and training—occupations much less arduous and physically much less risky than those they have replaced. And these new industries have created enormous, widely shared economic benefits in consumption; I will return to this subject below.

• Fourth, recent decades have seen a dramatic reduction in one of the greatest historical sources of inequality: the social and economic inequality of the sexes. Today, younger cohorts of working men and women with comparable education and job tenure earn essentially the same incomes.† The popular view would have it that the entry of women into the workforce has been driven by falling male earnings and the need "to make ends meet" in middle-class families. But the popular view is largely mistaken. Among married women (as the economist

* Here and elsewhere in the article I draw heavily on Fogel's research, much of which will appear in his forthcoming book, *The Fourth Great Awakening: The Political Realignment of the 1990's and the Future of Egalitarianism*, University of Chicago Press.

† See Diana Furchtgott-Roth and Christine Stolba, *Women's Figures: The Economic Progress of Women in America*, Independent Women's Forum and American Enterprise Institute (1997).

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Chinhui Juhn has demonstrated), it is wives of men with high incomes who have been responsible for most of the recent growth in employment.

• Fifth, in the wealthy Western democracies, material needs and desires have been so thoroughly fulfilled for so many people that, for the first time in history, we are seeing large-scale voluntary reductions in the amount of time spent at paid employment. This development manifests itself in different forms: longer periods of education and training for the young; earlier retirement despite longer life spans; and, in between, many more hours devoted to leisure, recreation, entertainment, family, community and religious activities, charitable and other nonremunerative pursuits, and so forth. The dramatic growth of the sports, entertainment, and travel industries captures only a small slice of what has happened. In Fogel's estimation, the time devoted to nonwork activities by the average male head of household has grown from 10.5 hours per week in 1880 to 40 hours today, while time per week at work has fallen from 61.6 hours to 33.6 hours. Among women, the reduction in work (including not only outside employment but also household work, food preparation, childbearing and attendant health problems, and child rearing) and the growth in nonwork have been still greater.

There is a tendency to overlook these momentous developments because of the often frenetic pace of modern life. But our busy-ness actually demonstrates the point: time, and not material things, has become the scarce and valued commodity in modern society.

III

ONE IMPLICATION of these trends is that in very wealthy societies, income has become a less useful gauge of economic welfare and hence of economic equality. When income becomes to some degree discretionary, and when many peoples' incomes change from year to year for reasons unrelated to their life circumstances, *consumption* becomes a better measure of material welfare. And by this measure, welfare appears much more evenly distributed: people of higher income spend progressively smaller shares on consumption, while in the bottom ranges, annual consumption often exceeds income. (In fact, government statistics suggest that in the bottom 20 percent of the income scale, average annual consumption is about twice annual income—probably a reflection of a substantial underreporting of earnings in this group.) According to the economist Daniel Slesnick, the distribution of consumption, unlike the distribution of reported income, has become measurably *more* equal in recent decades.

If we include leisure-time pursuits as a form of consumption, the distribution of material welfare appears flatter still. Many such activities, being informal by definition, are difficult to track, but Dora Costa of MIT has recently studied one measurable aspect—expenditures on recreation—and found that these have become strikingly more equal as people of lower income have increased the amount of time and money they devote to entertainment, reading, sports, and related enjoyments.*

Television, videocassettes, CD's, and home computers have brought musical, theatrical, and other entertainments (both high and low) to everyone, and have enormously narrowed the differences in cultural opportunities between wealthy urban centers and everywhere else. Formerly upper-crust sports like golf, tennis, skiing, and boating have become mass pursuits (boosted by increased public spending on parks and other recreational facilities as well as on environmental quality), and health clubs and full-line book stores have become as plentiful as gas stations. As some of the best things in life become free or nearly so, the price of pursuing them becomes, to that extent, the "opportunity cost" of time itself.

The substitution of leisure activities for income-producing work even appears to have become significant enough to be contributing to the recently much-lamented increase in inequality in measured income. In a new AEI study, Robert Haveman finds that most of the increase in earnings inequality among U.S. males since the mid-1970's can be attributed not to changing labor-market opportunities but to voluntary choice—to the free pursuit of nonwork activities at the expense of income-producing work.

Most of us can see this trend in our own families and communities. A major factor in income inequality in a wealthy knowledge economy is age—many people whose earnings put them at the top of the income curve in their late fifties were well down the curve in their twenties, when they were just getting out of school and beginning their working careers. Fogel again: today the average household in the top 10 percent might consist of a professor or accountant married to a nurse or secretary, both in their peak years of earning. As for the stratospheric top 1 percent, it includes not only

* *Less of a Luxury: The Rise of Recreation since 1888*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 6054 (June 1997).

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very rich people like Bill Cosby but also people like Cosby's fictional Huxtable family: an obstetrician married to a corporate lawyer. All these individuals would have appeared well down the income distribution as young singles, and that is where their young counterparts appear today.

That more young people are spending more time in college or graduate school, taking time off for travel and "finding themselves," and pursuing interesting but low- or non-paying jobs or apprenticeships before knuckling down to lifelong careers is a significant factor in "income inequality" measured in the aggregate. But this form of economic inequality is in fact the social equality of the modern age. It is progress, not regress, to be cherished and celebrated, not feared and fretted over.

IV

WHICH BRINGS me back to my contention that it is our very wealth and equality that are the undoing of the welfare state. Western government today largely consists of two functions. One is income transfers from the wages of those who are working to those who are not working: mainly social-security payments to older people who have chosen to retire rather than go on working and education subsidies for younger people who have chosen to extend their schooling before beginning work. The other is direct and indirect expenditures on medical care, also financed by levies on the wages of those who are working.* It is precisely these aspects of life—nonwork and expenditures on medical care and physical well-being—that are the booming sectors of modern, wealthy, technologically advanced society.

When the Social Security program began in America in the 1930's, retirement was still a novel idea: most men worked until they dropped, and they dropped much earlier than they do today. Even in the face of our approaching demographic crunch, produced by the baby boom followed by the baby bust, we could solve the financial problems of the Social Security program in a flash by returning to the days when people worked longer and died younger. Similarly, a world without elaborate diagnostic techniques, replaceable body parts, and potent pharmaceutical and other means of curing or ameliorating disease—a world where medical care consisted largely of bed rest and hand-holding—would present scant fiscal challenge to government as a provider of health insurance.

Our big government-entitlement programs truly are, as conservatives like to call them, obsolete. They are obsolete not because they were terrible ideas to begin with, though some of them were, but because of the astounding growth in social wealth and equality and because of the technological and economic developments which have propelled that growth. When Social Security was introduced, not only was retirement a tiny part of most people's lives but people of modest means had limited ability to save and invest for the future. Today, anyone can mail off a few hundred dollars to a good mutual fund and hire the best investment management American finance has to offer.

In these circumstances it is preposterous to argue, as President Clinton has done, that privatizing Social Security (replacing the current system of income transfers from workers to retirees with one of individually invested retirement savings) would be good for Warren Buffett but bad for the little guy. Private savings—through pension plans, mutual funds, and personal investments in housing and other durables—are *already* a larger source of retirement income than Social Security transfers. Moreover, although there is much talk nowadays about the riskiness of tying retirement income to the performance of financial markets, the social developments I have described suggest that the greater risk lies in the opposite direction. The current Social Security program ties retirement income to the growth of wage earners' payrolls; that growth is bound to be less than the growth of the economy as a whole, as reflected in the financial markets.

Similarly, Medicare is today a backwater of old-fashioned fee-for-service medicine, hopelessly distorted by a profusion of inefficient and self-defeating price-and-service controls. Over the past dozen years, a revolution has been carried out in the private financing and organization of medical care. The changes have not been unmixed blessings; nor could they be, so long as the tax code encourages people to overinsure for routine medical care. Yet substantial improvements in cost control and quality of service are now evident throughout the health-care sector—except under Medicare. These innovations have not been greeted by riots or strikes at the thousands of private organizations that have introduced them. Nor will there be riots

* Direct expenditures in the U.S. include Medicare for the elderly (financed mainly by a payroll tax) and Medicaid for the poor. Indirect expenditures, amounting to about $100 billion annually, are implicit in the exclusion from taxable income of employer-provided health insurance, which most middle- and upper-income Americans receive. The effect of this tax anomaly is to reduce wages and salaries in return for a subsidy toward the purchase of health insurance—the higher one's tax bracket, the greater the marginal subsidy.

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in the streets if, in place of the lame-brained proposals for Medicare "spending cuts" and still more ineffective price controls currently in fashion in Washington, similar market-based innovations are introduced to Medicare.

V

In sum, George Bush's famous statement in his inaugural address that "we have more will than wallet" was exactly backward. Our wallets are bulging; the problems we face are increasingly problems not of necessity, but of will. The political class in Washington is still marching to the tune of economic redistribution and, to a degree, "class warfare." But Washington is a lagging indicator of social change. In time, the progress of technology and the growth of private markets and private wealth will generate the political will to transform radically the redistributive welfare state we have inherited from an earlier and more socially balkanized age.

There are signs, indeed, that the Progressive-era and New Deal programs of social insurance, economic regulation, and subsidies and protections for farming, banking, labor organization, and other activities are already crumbling, with salutary effects along every point of the economic spectrum. Anyone who has been a business traveler since the late 1970's, for example, has seen firsthand how deregulation has democratized air travel. Low fares and mass marketing have brought such luxuries as foreign travel, weekend getaways to remote locales, and reunions of far-flung families—just twenty years ago, pursuits of the wealthy—to people of relatively modest means. Coming reforms, including the privatization of Social Security and, most of all, the dismantling of the public-school monopoly in elementary and secondary education,* will similarly benefit the less well-off disproportionately, providing them with opportunities enjoyed today primarily by those with high incomes.

I venture a prediction: just as airline deregulation was championed by Edward Kennedy and Jimmy Carter before Ronald Reagan finished the job, so the coming reforms will be a bipartisan enterprise. When the political class catches on (as Prime Minister Tony Blair has already done in England), the Left will compete vigorously and often successfully with the Right for the allegiance of the vast new privileged middle class. This may sound implausible at a moment when the Clinton administration has become an energetic agent of traditional unionism and has secured the enactment of several new redistributive tax provisions and spending programs. But the watershed event of the Clinton years will almost certainly be seen to be not any of these things but rather the defeat of the President's national health-insurance plan in the face of widespread popular opposition.

The lesson of that episode is that Americans no longer wish to have the things they care about socialized. What has traditionally attracted voters to government as a provider of insurance and other services is not that government does the job better or more efficiently or at a lower cost than private markets; it is the prospect of securing those services through taxes paid by others. That is why today's advocates of expanding the welfare state are still trying to convince voters to think of themselves as members of distinct groups that are net beneficiaries of government: students, teachers, women, racial minorities, union members, struggling young families, retirees, and so forth. But as the material circumstances of the majority become more equal, and as the proficiency and social reach of private markets increasingly outstrip what government can provide, the possibilities for effective redistribution diminish. The members of an egalitarian, middle-class electorate cannot improve their lot by subsidizing one another, and they know it.

With the prospects dimming for further, broad-based socialization along the lines of the Clinton health-care plan, the private supply of important social services will continue to exist and, in general, to flourish alongside government programs. Defenders of the welfare state will thus likely be reduced to asserting that private markets and personal choice may be fine for the well-off, but government services are more appropriate for those of modest means. This is the essence of President Clinton's objection to privatizing Social Security and of the arguments against school choice for parents of students in public elementary and high schools. But "capitalism for the rich, socialism for the poor" is a highly unpromising banner for liberals to be marching under in an era in which capitalism has itself become a profound egalitarian force.

VI

Where, then, will the battlegrounds be for the political allegiance of the new middle class? Increasingly, that allegiance will turn on poli-

* See "A Report Card on School Choice," by Paul E. Peterson, beginning on p. 29—Ed.

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cies involving little or no redistributive cachet but rather society-wide benefits in the form of personal amenity, autonomy, and safety: environmental quality and parks, medical and other scientific research, transportation and communications infrastructure, defense against terrorism, and the like. The old welfare-state debates between Left and Right will be transformed into debates over piecemeal incursions into private markets that compete with or replace government services. Should private insurers be required to cover annual mammograms for women in their forties? Should retirement accounts be permitted to invest in tobacco companies? Should parents be permitted to use vouchers to send their children to religious schools? Thus transformed, these debates, too, will tend to turn on considerations of general social advantage rather than on the considerations of social justice and economic desert that animated the growth of the welfare state.

Political allegiance will also turn increasingly on issues that are entirely nonmaterial. I recently bumped into a colleague, a noted political analyst, just after I had read the morning papers, and asked him to confirm my impression that at least half the major political stories of the past few years had something to do with sex. He smiled and replied, "Peace and prosperity."

What my colleague may have had in mind is that grave crises make all other issues secondary: President Roosevelt's private life received less scrutiny than has President Clinton's, and General Eisenhower's private life received less scrutiny than did that of General Ralston (whose nomination to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was torpedoed by allegations of an extramarital affair). There is, however, another, deeper truth in his observation. The stupendous wealth, technological mastery, and autonomy of modern life have freed man not just for worthy, admirable, and self-improving pursuits but also for idleness and unworthy and self-destructive pursuits that are no less a part of his nature.

And so we live in an age of astounding rates of divorce and family break-up, of illegitimacy, of single teenage motherhood, of drug use and crime, of violent and degrading popular entertainments, and of the "culture of narcissism"—and also in an age of vibrant religiosity, of elite universities where madrigal singing and ballroom dancing are all the rage and rampant student careerism is a major faculty concern, and of the Promise Keepers, over a million men of all incomes and races who have packed sports stadiums around the United States to declare their determination to be better husbands, fathers, citizens, and Christians. Ours is an age in which obesity has become a serious public-health problem—and in which dieting, fitness, environmentalism, and self-improvement have become major industries.

It is true, of course, that the heartening developments are in part responses to the disheartening ones. But it is also true that *both* are the results of the economic trends I have described here. In a society as rich and therefore as free as ours has become, the big question, in our personal lives and also in our politics, is: what is our freedom for?

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A Report Card on School Choice

Paul E. Peterson

In educating its young, the world's greatest industrial power cannot keep up with its competition. Consider the findings of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, which in 1995 tested over a half-million students in 41 countries. Although at the fourth-grade level American children scored passably well, behind the Japanese and Koreans but ahead of the British and Norwegians, by the eighth grade they ranked last among the major industrial nations. Compared with their peers, the longer our children stay in school, the farther behind they fall.

Nor does public education in the U.S. fare any better when considered on its own terms. Inflation-adjusted spending on education in the U.S. increased by 50 percent between 1974 and 1991—it is now at an all-time high of well over $300 billion a year—but this did virtually nothing to boost test scores. Over roughly the same period, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (and despite recent news reports to the contrary), elementary-school students showed only slight improvement in math and reading, while those of high-school age made no gains in these subjects and actually slipped in science and reading.

As bad as things look in the round, moreover, they are much worse in schools serving the low-income, minority populations in our inner cities. An analysis published by the *New York Times* last January, for example, found that New York City students performed worse than their peers in the rest of the state, even after controlling for race and income, and that the differences grew over time. In urban schools, bureaucracy, unionization, political corruption, and social dislocation have conspired in an especially cruel way to create a system seemingly impervious to serious, long-term reform.

In short, if public education in the United States were a business, investors would long since have put their money elsewhere. And in fact something along these lines is now beginning to happen. After well over a decade of distress signals and exhortation, touched off by the 1983 commission that first officially recognized the "rising tide of mediocrity" in American schools, a movement is growing to reconfigure the existing model of public education. In many cities and most states, and over the opposition of every interest group with a stake in the educational status quo, the new byword of reform is "choice."

At its most fundamental, choice simply entails giving parents and students more options when it comes to publicly supported schooling. Such options, the reasoning goes, will create competitive pressures where today there are only public monopolies with all their attendant problems. Under the discipline of the marketplace, schools will either satisfy their customers or close shop.

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So far, nothing quite so radical has happened: choice today remains an experiment rather than a full-fledged alternative. In practice, and at its most modest, the policy has meant allowing public-school students to pick from among schools within an existing district or, sometimes, from those in neighboring districts. In Massachusetts, for example, over 6,700 students from more than 200 districts have chosen to attend a school in another district.

A more ambitious incarnation of choice can be found in charter schools, independent public institutions that are allowed to operate with a relatively free hand on matters like curricula and union rules in exchange for meeting certain standards. The laws authorizing such schools vary a great deal from state to state, with some much more burdensome than others. In the six years since the first of the charter schools was launched, they have been a growth industry: nearly 700 of them, with well over 100,000 students, opened their doors in some twenty states this fall.

Both these forms of experimentation have much to recommend them. According to the Harvard economist Caroline Minter Hoxby, where interdistrict competition among public schools is more prevalent, school taxes are lower, students take more academic courses, and they learn more. And the early reports from charter schools, too, are upbeat.

Most proponents of choice, however, look beyond these modest variations on the traditional public-school system. The true advantages of an educational marketplace can be realized, they insist, only where parents and students are free to spend their school dollars wherever they see fit, including in private and, should they so desire, religious institutions.

Over 30 such programs, serving more than 13,000 students, have in fact sprung into existence since 1990, with financial support coming from both states and private donors. All operate through targeted subsidies that can be used only for tuition and other school expenses. The most common devices for accomplishing this are vouchers and scholarships, but tax deductions and credits are also being used, as under a new law in Minnesota.

For the most part, these more far-reaching experiments have been confined to our inner cities, and the great bulk of the participants comes from minority, low-income, single-parent families. This is no accident: however strongly the urban education establishment may resist change, parents in cities are desperate to rescue their children from dead-end schools. According to a recent survey by the Stanford political scientist Terry Moe, fully 79 percent of the inner-city poor favor vouchers, whereas the comparable figure for whites living in more advantaged communities is (a still-impressive) 59 percent. Another survey, by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, found school choice receiving the support of 65 percent of Hispanics and 57 percent of African-Americans, as against 47 percent of whites.

It is hardly surprising that low-income, inner-city families should see school choice as a way to win some of the latitude that their more affluent neighbors already enjoy. But are they also right to think that such programs can turn around the educational fortunes of their children?

THOUGH WE still have much to learn about school choice, what we know so far is encouraging. After reviewing the latest research on the largest voucher experiments from around the country, I count myself among the cautious optimists.

The programs now being studied in some detail—in Cleveland, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, New York, and San Antonio—represent just about every possible permutation of choice. Some are funded publicly, others privately. Rules vary among them about whether parents can throw in financial support of their own, and procedures for admission differ as well, with some programs using a lottery and others assigning places on a first-come, first-served basis. New York's School Choice Scholarships Program allows families to select from as many as 250 parochial and secular schools, while Milwaukee's state-supported program limits the choice to twenty nonreligious schools. A second effort in Milwaukee, the privately run Partners Advancing Values in Education, offers help to nearly 4,500 students, while San Antonio's Children's Educational Opportunity program reaches just under 1,000 children. Funding ranges from the $800 subsidy provided by Indianapolis's Educational Choice Charitable Trust to the $4,700 scholarship available under Milwaukee's state-supported program.

How do these varied programs measure up? Four different studies have found that families participating in school choice are more satisfied in virtually every way with their children's education. In San Antonio, for example, parents using vouchers were much more likely to say good things about discipline in their schools, and to be content with how much their children were learning, than were parents with children in the public system. Similar results turned up in Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee.

In yet another sign of satisfaction, a strikingly greater proportion of choice students sticks with

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their schools. In Milwaukee, for example, it is normal for 20 percent of public elementary-school students to change schools in the course of the academic year, and for fully 35 percent to find their way to another school come fall. By contrast, only 4 to 6 percent of elementary-school students in Milwaukee's state-funded school-choice program leave during the middle of the year, while 77 percent return to the same school after the summer.

Under school choice, teachers also find it far easier to teach. In San Antonio, for instance, where six out of ten middle-school teachers complain that their classroom environment is not conducive to learning, only one out of ten teachers in the school-choice program voices a similar complaint. Unsurprisingly, teachers in these private schools are also far more likely to assign homework and to expect their students to exceed course objectives by the end of the year.

Such positive responses would mean little if students were not learning more. But, by most indications, they are. My colleagues and I have found strong gains, especially in math, among first-year students in Cleveland's school-choice program; in the San Antonio program, in marked contrast to the declining performance of a public-school comparison group, scores went up over a three-year period between 1991 and 1994.

The most serious problem in evaluating these programs lies in distinguishing the effect of the schools themselves from other, nonacademic factors. This difficulty has provided ammunition to critics like Herbert Grover, a former state school superintendent in Wisconsin, who claims that students in school-choice programs do better because of the "initial advantages they enjoy from their parents." To some extent, the charge is easily answered: precisely because such programs tend to be limited to low-income, inner-city families, the demographic profile of the students usually matches that of their public-school peers. That being so, success cannot be rationalized by pointing to their parents' extra financial resources or level of education.

A related "selection" problem raised by skeptics is harder to get around. Because the privately funded programs in Indianapolis, San Antonio, and Milwaukee admit students on a first-come, first-served basis, places necessarily go to families that are quicker, more clever, and better connected. No amount of statistical tinkering, it is fair to claim, can ever fully correct for the encouragement such parents give their children.

But this problem, too, vanishes in those cases where scholarship winners are chosen by lottery, thereby creating two groups of students identical in every relevant way except for the fact that the winners had their names randomly drawn from a hat. Of the school-choice programs that have been operating under such a system, only one, the state-funded program in Milwaukee, has produced test results so far, and these numbers have been at the center of a swirling controversy.

A research team headed by John Witte of the University of Wisconsin took a first look at test results from Milwaukee and reported that students with vouchers got no discernible boost from attending private schools: their math and reading scores were no different from those of the control group. But when my colleague Jay P. Greene of the University of Texas and I looked at Witte's data, we quickly realized he had drawn the wrong comparison. Instead of measuring students in the school-choice program against those who had lost out in the lottery, he had measured them against a sample of Milwaukee public-school students from much more advantaged backgrounds who had performed significantly better on earlier tests. In brief, Witte had compared apples to oranges.

Returning to the raw data from Milwaukee, and focusing on the right two groups, Greene and I discovered that, after two years in the school-choice program, students were just a small step ahead of their peers. In a short time, however, they began to pull away, and by the end of the fourth year they were performing 11 percentile points better in reading and 6 points better in math. Modest though these results may appear at first glance, they are nevertheless impressive. If such progress were duplicated among minorities nationwide, it would reduce by as much as half the current disparity between their test scores and those of whites.

New York's School Choice Scholarships Foundation, which has enrolled its first students this fall, will offer a still better opportunity for gauging the effects of choice. To the astonishment of the program's organizers, over 20,000 applicants took part in the New York lottery. In addition to the 1,300 scholarship winners, a control group of another 1,300 is being selected from the same pool. Over the next four years, I will be working with David Myers of the firm Mathematica to see if New York gets the same pay-off from school choice that Milwaukee has so far earned.

As most supporters of school choice acknowledge, it is premature to talk about the wholesale dismantling of our 150-year-old public-school

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system, where some 90 percent of American students still receive instruction. School choice has not yet had a chance to prove itself. It needs to be undertaken gradually, experimentally, and with a focus on the places that are in the greatest need.

To opponents of the experiment, however, even this is too much. The many interests served by the current system have done everything in their power to quash the modest pilot programs and to keep others from getting off the ground. To take but one illustrative episode: in an unguarded moment during last year's presidential debate, Bill Clinton, ever on the lookout for an issue popular with voters, declared, "If a local school district in Cleveland or any place else wants to have a private-school choice plan like Milwaukee did, let them have at it." The next day, presidential advisers scrambled to reassure the indignant national teachers' unions that the President had been misunderstood; he held firm in his unqualified opposition to public funding for any scheme of private-school choice.

Justifying such resistance has become harder in the face of clear evidence that progress is being made in these schools. Deprived of the argument that school choice will do nothing for academic achievement, opponents have resorted to other grounds for not giving it a chance.

The first and simplest objection is a constitutional one. According to the critics, publicly-funded vouchers or scholarships that can wind up in the hands of parochial schools (Catholic, Jewish, Episcopalian, or whatever) amount to an "establishment" of religion on the part of government and hence are in flagrant violation of the First Amendment.

Next, and in a related vein, opponents of school choice maintain that it threatens our deepest democratic values. The schools in a country like ours teach more than the three R's; they also aim to instruct students in their responsibilities as citizens in a free, diverse society—a task to which the public schools have been traditionally and uniquely well-suited. In this respect, school choice may end up acting as a mighty solvent of social solidarity, encouraging the further balkanization of American life and subsidizing educational enterprises run by who-knows-what sorts of extremists—from neo-Nazis and black nationalists to witches and eco-zealots. As Michael Kelly, then editor of the *New Republic*, put it:

> Public money is shared money, and it is to be used for the furtherance of shared values, in the interests of *e pluribus unum*. Charter schools and their like . . . take from the *pluribus* to destroy the *unum*.

Finally, foes of school choice ask, what about those left behind? Choice programs, they assert, rob the public schools of their brightest students—students indispensable to the academic progress of their classmates. In so doing, they shift public attention away from the urgency of our educational problems, tempting policy-makers (in the words of the American Federation of Teachers) with "promises to 'save' a handful of students" instead of doing what needs to be done to improve the achievement "of all of our youngsters."

EACH OF these arguments is in fact rather thin. To begin with the supposed constitutional problem: the Supreme Court, it is becoming increasingly clear, has no objection in principle to letting public dollars go to religious schools as part of a wider educational program and so long as neither a particular faith nor religion itself is given a special advantage. In *Mueller* v. *Allen* (1983), for example, the Court held that an educational tax deduction passed constitutional muster even though parents could use it for secular or parochial schooling. And just this past June, in *Agostini* v. *Felton*, the Court decided that it did not violate the First Amendment for state-supported teachers to provide parochial-school students with the same remedial instruction available in the public schools. The key in this case (as in *Mueller*) was that benefits were being provided "without regard to the sectarian [or] nonsectarian . . . nature of the institution."*

The constitutional objections to school choice also fly in the face of long-accepted policy when it comes to public support for *higher* education. Since 1973, for example, federal Pell grants have been available to low-income college students going either to secular or religious schools. More recently, Congress passed and President Clinton signed into law a tax credit that can be used at any secular or religious college, from San Francisco State to Notre Dame or Concordia. By what reasoning is comparable aid to younger children to be deemed unconstitutional?

As for the anti-democratic threat posed by private schools, there is no evidence that such a thing exists. To the contrary, private schools seem to be

* Lower state courts in Ohio and Wisconsin, relying in part on their own state constitutions, have ruled against publicly-supported school-choice programs that include religious schools. Both cases are still being litigated, however, and may well be affected by the Supreme Court's most recent ruling.

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doing a much better job than public schools in teaching the virtues of American citizenship. According to a recent study, based on data from the U.S. Department of Education, private-school students, far from shunning involvement with the wider community, are considerably more public-spirited than their public-school counterparts, volunteering more often and more regularly in community affairs. And far from sowing division in society, not only are private schools more racially integrated than neighboring public schools, but their students enjoy more cross-racial friendships and engage in fewer race-related fights.

True, public funding could indeed call into being a new and more destructive strain of private or quasi-private school, and has already done so in a number of places where choice has been insufficiently regulated. But the answer is to see to it that taxpayer dollars do not flow to every self-styled educator who sets up shop; appropriate financial and educational standards are a must. Public oversight, however, is not the same thing as public operation; there is no reason for the government to become a dairy, so to speak, just because it regulates milk.

And what of those children left behind in the public schools? Will they not suffer? In the first place, white, middle-class students have already fled in large numbers to the suburbs or the private schools. Bright but less-advantaged students have similarly deserted the most desperate urban schools, opting for the magnet programs and classes for the gifted that are now available in big-city systems. The sad fact is that many of the students who remain in the public schools have already been left behind.

But more to the point, perhaps, are two other considerations. One is that most programs of school choice do not, as a matter of course, attract the best and the brightest students, for the simple reason that most parents are reluctant to switch schools when their children are doing well in them. The other is that even if some better students do decamp for private schools, the effect on those remaining is unlikely to be all that serious. Research confirms what we know from common sense: children learn primarily from parents and teachers, not from other children. In the expert view of sociologists Christopher Jencks and Susan Mayer, the academic impact of peer groups is small, inconsistent, and by no means straightforward: in some cases, students thrive by absorbing facts and ideas from their more capable peers, but in others they get positively discouraged when they cannot keep up.

Finally, far from drawing attention away from our inner-city schools, school choice subjects them to just the sort of scrutiny they sorely need. Why indeed do they spend their money so inefficiently? What is it, precisely, that prevents them from establishing standards for achievement and behavior as high as those of private schools? Why do their students perform so poorly year after year? One can only conclude that defenders of our failing public schools are alarmed by school choice because it serves as a ferocious standing indictment of what they themselves have wrought.

In the imaginings of its most ardent supporters, by contrast, school choice, if widely implemented, could go a long way toward transforming our cities. Existing private schools would expand, and new ones would be called into existence. The public schools, finally feeling the heat of competition, would begin to address their most serious problems. Young parents with school-age children would forgo moving to the suburbs. Other parents would give up their suburban homes to live closer to their work in the city. As test scores rose among low-income minority students, they would become far more employable upon graduation, sparking a return of businesses to the inner city. Property values there would begin to rise, and racial integration would take an upward swing.

It is a lot to expect. But if even part of this rosiest of scenarios is plausible, school choice is an experiment we cannot afford to pass up.

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Lithuanian Pastoral

Dan Jacobson

NO LANDSCAPES can be more deceitfully innocent in appearance than those of Lithuania. True, I visited the country in June, at the peak of the summer, when every growing thing was as thick, tall, green, and succulent as it ever would be. But it was not that which gave the countryside its trance-like look of trust and openness. Rather, it was the absence of visible demarcations within it. Outside the towns and villages there were virtually no wire fences, no hedges, no palings, no stone walls, no recognizable signs indicating where one person's property ended and another's began. Here, it seemed, they were confident their neighbors would not trespass on their lands, their cattle not trample down the fields of wheat and rye that lay about unprotected everywhere, their flocks of goats not devour the vegetable beds made available to them.

How could this be? It turned out that there was a simple answer to this question, at least as far as the animals were concerned. There was no need to fear damage from herds of cattle or flocks of goats because the Lithuanians did not have any. One cow at a time was the rule here; two or three goats; no sheep at all. These animals were always kept tied to a post or to the trunk of a tree, generally within yards of the nearest farmstead. Munching in the sun or lying in the shade, they looked wholly at peace with their lot, like creatures in an 18th-century etching of rural life. Once a cow had eaten a circle around itself, it would be led by a boy or a girl to a different tree, with a virginal area of grass around it, and tied up there for a new meal to begin. Calves were not tied up at all; they were left to stick close to their mothers, which they always did, and to follow them obediently home when, toward evening, they were dragged away for milking.

No flocks, no herds: no need for fences. Hence the candid, artless look of the countryside, as if entire historical periods had been bypassed and an earlier period preserved: one that preceded not only the Communist collectivizations but pre-industrial enclosures as well. Some lands, I was told, remained in collective ownership still, though the process of returning them to individual farmers had begun; if so, the difference between private and collective land was impossible for a stranger to discern. Even the railway lines were seldom fenced off. If you happened to live in one of the arthritic wooden cottages along the line, and wanted to catch the train, you simply stood next to the line and flagged it down. If it was the nonexpress kind, on which my son and I found ourselves, it stopped. The cow or goat in the nearest orchard looked on placidly: it presented no danger to the train, and vice versa.

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In front of the railside cottages were circular, concrete-lined wells with little tents of wood or concrete over them. Then a scrappy, unpicturesque village would appear, built for the most part of a near-universal, sandy-looking brick. Then more flat, fenceless fields of wheat, rye, or barley; more orchards (apples, mostly); berries on canes; beans on stakes; cauliflowers and cabbages growing fat on the ground; another wooden cottage with fretwork ornamentation along its eaves; grassy plains dotted with wild flowers. No mountains; barely anything resembling a hill; slow-flowing rivers; stretches of woodland; a substantial tree-fringed lake or two—and that was it, as far as "features" went.

Tilting this way and that, falling into small depressions and rising sedately out of them, the plains looked silvery in hue, compared with the darker, stronger greens of cultivated crops; the woods were darker still; newly ploughed or sown fields almost black; the horizon a tenuous blue, just distinguishable from the blue of the sky. Thick clumps of lupines grew like weeds all over the place, their individual flowers so big and so purple I wondered if they were a cultivated variety that had somehow escaped from captivity and gone feral, like rabbits in Australia or cats on South Georgia Island.

Nor were the stretches of woodland or forest as dark and sinister in appearance as I had thought they would be; at least not in the regions I traveled through. They were less extensive, too. I had pictured mile after mile of somber, unbroken pine and birch, and little else. But none of the woods I saw took over the landscape entirely. Oak and sycamore abounded, along with lime and ash, alder and poplar. They looked altogether friendlier, gentler, more midsummer-night's-dreamy than my childhood imaginings would have led me to expect. Like so much else seen from the windows of the cars, trains, or buses we traveled on, they seemed to cloak themselves in an insidious literary-moralistic mist, a pictorial-aesthetic haze.

The same was true of the tasks people could be seen carrying out in all the rural areas. A woman drew water from a well outside her cottage. Men and women scythed grass together and heaped it up in bee-hive-shaped stacks. A man harrowed a field behind a single horse. A family group knelt together to weed a large patch of vegetables. A solitary girl carried harvested fruit (berries?) home in a large basket. A man flicked his whip at a mule, his coffin-shaped wagon trundling along behind him. Dwarfed by the ploughed field ahead of her, a woman scattered seed out of a bag slung over her shoulder.

NEED I say it? Leave the road, enter the woods, and bump for several hundred yards along a double-track so narrow that the sides of the car are brushed all the way by hazel twigs and (more softly, almost as if with feather-dusters) by bracken. Then get out and walk along a bramble-entangled footpath. Come to a sun-dappled, fenced-off space. A flat stone, perhaps four feet high, stands on edge within it. Incised into its top left-hand corner is a gilt Star of David. Below the star is an inscription in Yiddish and Lithuanian, with a date recording the day during World War II on which the Jews of Babtai and Vandziogela were brought here to be shot. Stand and look around, while birds chirp and argue and agitate the leaves that conceal them from you.

Walk back to the car, return to the road, go forward another few miles, leave the road, travel a much shorter distance through the woods: same woods, sunlight, brambles, birdsong; same fence, too, you might think; same cleared space inside, and up-reared stone with the Star of David and inscription in Lithuanian and Yiddish. Only this one bears a slightly different date, and this is where the Jews of Ariogalai were brought to be shot. Return to the road, go on a few more miles, enter the woods. . . .

All right—stop—enough—we do not need to go and see where the Jews of Nemaksciai were shot. We could spend a week, a month, like this. I want to get to the town where my grandfather served as rabbi for many years.

But in the end we did go to at least one other place in the woods. Like the others, it was a fenced, sun-fretted clearing in the midst of what felt like a primordial silence, broken only by the conversation of birds and their scufflings about overhead and in the undergrowth.

OUR GUIDE'S name had been given to me by a colleague at my university in London. I shall call him Shlomo. A short, plump, demi-shaven bachelor approaching middle age, he was recognizable by the yellow and white baseball cap he had warned me he would be wearing. His outfit also included a short-sleeved T-shirt with green and white stripes, a pair of creased pink trousers, and the inevitable sneakers below. On his back was a small canvas bag, slung by a strap over a shoulder; in the rear pocket of his trousers, a wallet stuffed with Lithuanian bank notes and the visiting cards of past clients.

When he talked he was all noise and bustle, interspersed with generous gestures and outbursts of scraping laughter from the back of his throat. That

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was his manner even when he spoke, as he often had to, of terrible scenes and events. When he was immobile, an unreachable melancholy seemed to take hold of him. Silent, he was like another person. His mouth hung a little open, the lines around it deepened, his chin seemed to sink down on itself, and an abstracted, greenish glint appeared in his brown eyes. He had a characteristic way of standing then, with one arm across his belly and its cupped hand supporting the elbow of the other arm, so that his chin could come to rest reflectively on his curled fingers.

Like almost all the Jews I met, Shlomo told me that his parents had managed to flee into Russia ahead of the advancing German army. Now his father was dead and his mother lived in a flat on the outskirts of Kovno (Kaunas). Once, when we came back later than we had expected from one of our excursions, I noticed that his first thought was to phone her and let her know that all was well.

Alternating between the relative solitude of his bachelor state and the transient intimacies of his work, Shlomo took his duties as a guide very seriously. His chosen description of himself, which he repeated to me with the air of a man who had given the matter careful thought, was "ambassador to the Jewish people." "Ambassador *of* the Jewish people?" I suggested, puzzled by the phrase. But he was insistent: "No, ambassador *to* the Jewish people." I did not pursue the discussion further, but I wondered on whose behalf, exactly, he saw himself carrying out his ambassadorial duties. The Jews still living in Lithuania? The dead who so vastly outnumbered them?

I suspected the latter. Even in some of the characteristics I have described as peculiar to him, Shlomo was like several other Jews I met during my visit. In their demeanor there was a curiously baffled attentiveness which made me think of deaf persons listening for sounds they will never hear. They moved through a strange vacancy that seemed to lie within them and yet belonged also to the world outside themselves; hence it was always to be encountered anew by them. It was as if they were constantly accompanied not only by the dead but also by the never-to-be born: all those who should have been their contemporaries and companions today, the men and women whom the dead had never been given the chance of conceiving, bearing, nourishing, and bringing to adulthood.

There he was, anyway, the ambassador to the Jewish people, myself and my son included, and he was to prove indispensable. He had done his homework. Though no one before me had ever asked for his help in getting to Vorna (Varniai), my grandfather's little town, or to Kelm (Kelme), my great-grandfather's bigger one, he had discovered that in each of them there remained "one last Jew" whom we should make it our business to meet. Which in due course we did. Without him we would also never have found, at the end of those overgrown double-tracks through the woods, any of those randomly sited, fenced-off areas, each with a dated stone inside it, which marked what Shlomo invariably called a "mass massacre" site.

It was clear from the way he said the two words that he firmly believed "mass" and "massacre" to be organically connected through a common root. Who could blame him for the error? Or would choose to correct it?

OVER AND over again, wherever we traveled, I saw signs on the roadside that reminded me of conversations I have often had with Jewish contemporaries. Always the names are pronounced with an apologetic, humorous air, as if there were something inherently absurd in the speaker having any connection, however remote, with places identified by such clusters of outlandish vowels and syllables. "Oh, my grandparents came from a little place in Lithuania called Mariampole." "Mine came from Ponevezh." "Klokalai, I think." "Something like Radviliski." And so forth.

In Lithuania I came to understand, as I never truly had before, how each and every one of those humble names will serve just as well as others far better known, far more infamous, to designate the unparalleled catastrophe that befell the Jews of Eastern Europe. The same applies of course to countless other names, unknown to me. It is true also of my grandfather's town of Vorna, though there is no "mass massacre" site in its immediate vicinity. From an elderly lady I met there—its "last Jew"—I learned that a few weeks after the Germans arrived the women and children from the town were marched many kilometers north before they were murdered in the woods, along with hundreds of others gathered there from all over the district. The men were taken even further afield, to Telz, and shot there.

The Germans invaded Lithuania on June 22, 1941. By the end of August, according to the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (1990), the "overwhelming majority of the Jews in the provinces [had been] slaughtered." That is to say: in towns and villages scattered all over Lithuania, a country roughly the size of Ireland, 600 years of Jewish life were

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brought to an end over a period of only ten weeks. Rifle and machine-gun fire was the chosen method of "liquidation." By the beginning of December 1941, SS Standardfüehrer Karl Jaeger, head of *Einsatzkommando* 3, was able to boast to his superiors that only 15 percent of Lithuanian Jewry (all of them what he called "work Jews," most of them in the ghettos of Kovno and Vilna) were still alive. "I can confirm today that *Einsatzkommando* 3," he wrote, "has reached the goal of solving the Jewish problem in Lithuania."

Almost four more years of killing were yet to come.

THE JEWISH cemetery of Vorna is situated on an elevation well outside the town. A new, steel-stranded fence, with gate to match, runs around the entire plot. I spend some time wandering about it, looking unsuccessfully for a gravestone commemorating my grandfather, Rabbi Yisrael Yehoshua (Heshel) Melamed.

Some of the stones have been pushed aside by trees; others, like the bodies they had been put there to mark, have virtually been driven underground by the mere passage of time; many are concealed by the flourishing grass, which grows so tall and so thickly that nowhere do the soles of my shoes touch the earth. Beneath this year's grass there is only last year's grass matted down. Wild flowers grow everywhere: cow-parsley with crunchy stalks and tiny, lace-like petals; the perfect white wheels of starworts; galaxies of shining dandelion globes. Shoes wet with dew and sap, nostrils filled with the sweetness my footsteps release from the growth they are crushing, I walk this way and that, sometimes stumbling over the uneven surface. Plenty of Rivkas, Shmuels, Avrahams, Feiges, Zalmans, Sarahs, Lezars, with surnames to match. Plenty of bright sun and trembling leaf shadows; tree trunks like columns, some seamed, some smooth; a distant view of the silver onion-dome of Vorna's biggest church. But no Heshel Melamed.

The only cleared section (so far) is the one nearest the gate; it is also the most recent, the dates of the stones there being all post-1920's—after my grandfather's death and the departure of the family from Vorna. All the inscriptions are of course in Hebrew. With an eerie exactitude, not a single stone among them is dated later than May 1941. One that I come upon says of the sixteen-year-old boy (*babur*) lying beneath it that he had been charming and cultivated (*nehmad u-maskil*). How his parents and family must have mourned for him when he died in 1936, knowing nothing of what he was to be spared!

Near the gate there is a granite memorial which carries a message different from those I have seen on stones of similar size and shape at other sites. Below the Star of David appear the following words in Yiddish and Lithuanian: UNTIL 1941 IN THIS PLACE THERE USED TO BE (*iz gevezen*) THE JEWISH CEMETERY OF VORNA. I have to consider the wording carefully before I come to understand it. In effect, this memorial now serves as a gravestone for nothing less than the cemetery itself. Here, the inscription tells us, where so many of the dead have lain for so many generations, my grandfather among them, there had been a cemetery once. Though they lie here still, it is not to be described as "the Jewish cemetery of Vorna" now. It ceased to be that in 1941, when the community which it "used to" serve was destroyed.

In 1941 the people who should have been buried here went to their deaths anonymously, indiscriminately, and were thrown into the common pits and pyres that their killers had made them prepare beforehand.

Since then, no one. That is why it is a cemetery no longer.

STANDING TO one side with Shlomo and my son is the woman who has brought us to the cemetery. As I approach she greets me in Yiddish, gesturing ironically to the silent congregation around her. "You see," she says, "I am the *rebbitzen* of Vorna now."

The rabbi's wife. The first lady of Vorna. The claim falls strangely on my ears, for my grandmother, Menuhah, had been wife of the *real* rabbi of Vorna, the man whose stone I had just been looking for. In his day the town's Jewish community had numbered about 700 people; they had had Heshel Melamed as their rabbi, and a synagogue, and two *shtiblach* (small houses of prayer), and this cemetery waiting for them all.

Now she alone remains. She represents everyone and is responsible for everything. With the help of money donated by a visiting American, she has made it her business to restore and maintain the cemetery. The new fence and gate are a token of what she has already accomplished; so is the clearing of the ground currently going on. In her late sixties, I would guess, she has wide, brown, light-filled eyes; thick hair, black and gray in color, combed to one side and falling over her broad forehead in a single wave; narrow, slantingly smiling lips, with a touch of lipstick on them; a pointed chin; many deep lines around her mouth; strong cheekbones; a neck which is still sturdy. Every

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averted glance, or sudden, direct gaze, or tilt of her head, expresses alertness, curiosity, humor.

She is delighted to have our company, and makes no attempt to hide it. She has told us that she is not a native of Vorna but of another town nearby; that as a girl she had managed to flee into the woods from the crowd of women and children gathered for slaughter the next morning; subsequently she had been incarcerated in the Shavl ghetto, before being transferred to the yet greater horrors of the concentration camp at Stutthoff. Of the rest of her family she does not speak, and I do not ask. Out of all this she emerged to study mathematics at the university in Memel (Klapeida), and had then come to Vorna to teach in the local high school.

A widow now, she was married previously to a Lithuanian; her two sons live in Kovno and Vilna respectively. She had been hoping, I now learn, that the younger one would come to visit her this weekend, but he is busy playing bridge—in a big tournament, she adds, a mixture of pride and scorn in her voice. Whether the scorn is directed against him (for choosing to play bridge instead of coming to see her) or against herself (for being proud of his success at the game), I cannot determine. He, the bridge player, is her "Jewish" son, she says, with a brief, enigmatic smile. Then she explains what she means by this, if not what she feels about it. "He is dark." (*Er iz tunkl.*)

She did not come to Vorna until well after the war, and so cannot tell me anything about it before the cataclysm. She has no idea where the rabbi and his family had lived; the *shul*, she knows, was razed to the ground. I remember my mother once telling me that the house in which she had spent her childhood was the only double-story, brick-built house in the town; but I have already seen for myself that there are now hundreds upon hundreds of them.

Some time later we leave for a meal in the house of yet another "last Jew in Vorna," of whose existence we have just learned from our sardonic, self-appointed *rebbitzen*. The cemetery is soon out of sight. How I would have felt if I had found my grandfather's stone in it, among all the others, is something I cannot guess. I do know, though, that my failure to do so weighs little with me. How could it, in the midst of so devastating an absence and emptiness everywhere; when I am in the midst of a region where so many memories, an entire nation of memories, have been effaced? Heshel Melamed is where he belongs, where he wished to be, hidden among the remains of those who for centuries had preceded him and of the people who had followed him here: the very last of those permitted to take their place alongside him, in named, individual graves. He himself had no doubt accompanied many of the families of the dead to this spot, and had led the prayers for them there.

Everything I have seen would have been familiar to him. Everything except for the memorial near the gate, with its terrible message.

THE OTHER (or second-last) Jew in Vorna is younger than our *rebbitzen*—flightier, poorer, less educated. Her skimpy hair is dyed the color of iodine; she is dressed in a pink, befrilled apron. She too is married to a Lithuanian who is apparently still alive, but who keeps himself out of sight. She has laid out for us a copious, Russian-style spread of salami, smoked eel, herring, tomatoes, onions, gherkins, rye bread, cheese, jam, butter, homemade apple-and-raspberry wine (strong and sweet), instant coffee. And an East European specialty that I had seen and quailed at once before, consisting of a slice of pure white pork fat with a thin streak of claret-colored meat across the top of it.

She herself eats nothing, but constantly jumps up and down, passes items around, insists we eat everything, eats nothing herself, refills our glasses with apple-and-raspberry wine. The room contains a television set, a sideboard with mirror, a glass-fronted, glass-shelved cupboard revealing a variety of jugs, tumblers, wine glasses, and bowls within, and a large wood-burning stove (shut down for the summer) with a tiled chimney going all the way to the ceiling. Other items in view include a cluster of no fewer than three wooden crucifixes of different sizes affixed to a wall, a trunk resting on the floor, an ambitious rubber plant, and a pair of photographs in matching plastic frames.

In the course of the meal I learn that our hostess was born in Vorna. She survived the war because a Catholic priest took her mother, herself, and her two sisters under his protection. She says nothing about her father and, again, I do not ask. Nor does she offer any explanation of why the priest acted as he did. He succeeded in settling them with different peasant families in the countryside, where they grew up. She was five years old when the Germans came. So she too has virtually no memory of prewar Vorna. When I ask (not expecting a positive answer) if she remembers anyone in the town ever mentioning to her a family Melamed, she admits that the name means nothing to her. We part from her with many thanks and, on her side, tearful embraces. The embraces of the *rebbitzen*, offered later, are more restrained and (I feel) more heartfelt still.

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IN KOVNO (Kaunas), Lithuania's second city. Its Old Town is smaller but much less disrupted by new roads and parking lots than the equivalent quarter of the capital, Vilnius. The main pedestrian promenade is a jostle of architectural styles from the 15th century onward; the side streets are short and shabby. All are steeped in subdued tints that pulse slowly in the midsummer Baltic light, during the evenings especially. The Town Hall square is positively grand, and not the less so for having a low terrace of late-medieval buildings huddled along one side. If the square and the churches nearby were all picked up and moved 500 miles to the west, they would probably be surrounded by cordons of tour buses; the cobbled piazza would be littered with reclining backpackers; the medieval buildings would be transformed into shops selling lavender bags, glassware, oatmeal soaps, and hand-knitted sweaters.

Instead, the whole area is empty. Only one small bar is open. Children play ballgames in the vacant spaces. Bells ring. Now a couple of housewives cross the square, their slippers scuffling on the stones. Then it is the turn of an old priest and a young one. Their shoes go clop-clop, in ecclesiastical measure.

This is the last evening of several that we have spent in Kovno. We leave the square behind us and walk toward the confluence of the Neris and Nemunas rivers. The houses on the farther side of the square are more handsome and even more dilapidated than those we have already seen. But they too soon come to an end, and we find ourselves on a sandy path running through a low-lying area of uncultivated grass and shrubs, just a foot or two above the water line. Across the water are reeds and scattered buildings in one direction; a steep, heavily wooded bank in another.

At the confluence of the rivers the path curves toward a dismantled church and a medieval brick fortress. The fort's outer buildings and walls could be those of a neglected farm; its keep is circular and topped by a pointed, hatlike iron roof. Two women are walking ahead of us; one is young, one middle-aged; they are talking in English, though it is the mother tongue of neither; both are smartly dressed, in soft blouses and pale, long skirts that are clearly not of Lithuanian origin. I hear the younger woman say, speaking of the exiled Russian poet, "Joseph Brodsky is also dead, is he not?"

A group of young people now comes toward us, a half dozen of them, men and women. They are laughing and talking loudly, but are apparently not so preoccupied with one another as to overlook our foreignness, or our Jewishness, or both. They have gone several yards past us when I hear, not for the first time since my arrival in Lithuania, elaborate hawking and throat-clearing followed by a violent expectoration. But what I then hear is wholly unfamiliar. It is the sound of the gob falling just behind my foot. Given the distance between us and given the fact that the spitter would have had to turn 180 degrees in order to direct his mouthful in our direction, this cannot be accidental.

My son says, "He's just doing it to show off." I argue that he did it because I am a Jew. It may also be that to have passed two groups of foreigners speaking English, one after the next, had been too much for his sensitive soul to bear.

Back to the square, which by now is completely deserted. Back to the gracious town hall. It is known (or so the guide book claims) as the White Swan, because of its white walls and elegantly tall white tower. Another kind of "guide book" to Kaunas, *The Kovno Ghetto Diary of Avraham Tory*,* tells me some less gracious things about the uses to which the building has been put. On occasion.

But then, there is no corner of this bland, haunted country over which the same shadow does not hang.

* Edited and introduced by Martin Gilbert, Harvard (1990).

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Why Die for Danzig?

Joshua Muravchik

WITH THE procedures for admitting new members into NATO having been set in motion at July's summit meeting in Madrid, the debate over expanding the alliance has begun in earnest. Although agreements will not be submitted to a Senate vote until next year, the committee on foreign relations has scheduled hearings on the subject to begin this month, and a parade of military and diplomatic authorities will testify on what, if approved, would amount to a solemn pledge to treat an attack on Poland, Hungary, or the Czech Republic as an attack upon the United States.

The debate that will unfold in hearings, then in committee deliberations, and finally on the Senate floor is thus likely to constitute the fullest exchange of views about America's role in the world since the Soviet Union disappeared. The decision will be a historic one, and it is certainly being seen that way by Bill Clinton. With the Middle East peace process stalled, Bosnia still mired in ethnic hatred, and the President's domestic accomplishments heavily mortgaged to the Republicans, NATO expansion could turn out to be the issue for which his administration is best remembered.

If so, it will be rich irony. Clinton began his presidency with a focus sharply skewed toward domestic policy: as he put it in 1993, brushing aside a question on Bosnia, "What I got elected to do was to let America look at our own problems." To compound the irony, the Clinton team was itself initially ambivalent about expanding NATO. This history left Clinton open to the jibe of Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, caught by an open microphone as he whispered to two other prime ministers at the Madrid summit, that Clinton's reversal was motivated less by national-security considerations than by the desire to curry favor with American voters of East European descent.

Yet if Clinton can be accused of seeking partisan advantage, the same accusation can be brought against the Republicans. Until this year, the main Republican complaint about NATO enlargement was that Clinton was not proceeding quickly enough. When in 1996 the Senate approved the NATO Enlargement Facilitation Act, authorizing funds to help Central European states prepare for membership, Republicans broke overwhelmingly in favor of the bill. Yet as the Madrid summit approached, twenty Senators, fourteen of them Republicans, released an open letter to Clinton posing pointed questions about enlargement. The document was plainly intended as a shot across the President's bow.

The shifting sands of partisan politics are not the only hazards on the path to U.S. ratification of NATO enlargement (which must also be approved by each of the other fifteen current members). The populist pot that was brought to a boil during the

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debate over NAFTA will be stirred again by isolationists like Patrick J. Buchanan. Though this is unlikely to yield more than it did the last time around, when the stew was seasoned with the threat of lost American jobs, the atmosphere could change radically if, say, during the course of the deliberations, extremists in Bosnia managed to kill some of the American troops stationed there.

Then there are the issues of the budgetary costs of expansion and of equitable burden-sharing among the allies. No sooner had French President Jacques Chirac left the Madrid summit, where he joined in declaring that "admitting new members will entail . . . providing the resources which enlargement will necessarily require," than he returned home to announce that France would not contribute a single franc. Senator Joseph Biden, a supporter of enlargement, has warned that such conflicts over burden-sharing pose an "existential" challenge to NATO that could "torpedo" ratification.

Voices of skepticism or opposition have been raised not just by the twenty Senators who signed the open letter but also by foreign-affairs columnists like Thomas L. Friedman of the *New York Times* and Jim Hoagland of the *Washington Post*, and by a group of 50 experts and former officials organized by Susan Eisenhower, granddaughter of the former President. While heavily weighted with cold-war doves whose opposition seems of a piece with their criticisms of other U.S. security policies, the group also includes such stalwarts of national defense as Paul Nitze, Richard Pipes, and Fred Iklé. The 50 have castigated NATO expansion as "a policy error of historic proportions."

DIFFERENT CRITICS emphasize different points, but for some of them a major theme, after the issue of costs, is that Americans should not be required, in effect, to "die for Danzig" (to resuscitate the rallying cry of pre-World War II appeasers). Christopher Layne of the libertarian Cato Institute, for example, has written that "the best way for America to stay out of future European wars is not to be militarily present on the continent when they begin." While most critics do not share the sharp bent of Layne and his colleagues, the same underlying sentiment echoes in Jim Hoagland's sarcastic comment that Americans will next be expected to "promise to die for Ljubljana [Slovenia], Tallinn [Estonia], and Bucharest [Romania]." It echoes, too, in the warning of the Eisenhower group against "security guarantees to countries with serious border and national-minority problems and unevenly developed systems of democratic government."

Another argument against expansion—which also amounts to an argument against NATO's continuance even in its present form—is that the proper vehicle for preserving peace in post-cold-war Europe is no longer NATO but some larger international body. James Chace, the former managing editor of *Foreign Affairs* and now the editor of *World Policy Journal*, proposes creating just such a "European Security Organization," while Jonathan Clarke, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, has suggested that the vehicle already exists in the form of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

For other opponents of enlargement, the goal is not that NATO itself disappear but, on the contrary, that it be preserved as it is. Thomas Friedman worries that "expansion . . . will dilute [NATO's] power every bit as much as baseball expansion diluted Major League pitching and made every 90-pound weakling a home-run threat." Others, like the Eisenhower group, caution that expansion "will draw new lines of division between the 'ins' and 'outs.'" Michael Mandelbaum of the Council on Foreign Relations contends that expansion would "recreate further to the east the line of division that existed during the cold war" and thus impose a new "gray zone" of insecurity with Russia.

This brings us to the argument that weighs most heavily with foreign-policy specialists: namely, that NATO expansion will arouse fears or sensitivities among Russians that will weaken the standing of pro-Western democrats in that country to the benefit of nationalists and Communists. "The prospect of expansion has already damaged the West's relations with Russia," writes Mandelbaum, and Friedman adds that "America's allies in Russia are already feeling less room to maneuver." Susan Eisenhower takes the point further, viewing NATO expansion as but the culmination of a pattern of Western high-handedness toward Russia that began during the Gorbachev days and that has brought upon Russia a dangerous "sense of shame and defeat" whose consequences may well return to haunt us.

HOW MUCH weight do these objections carry? Interestingly enough, almost all of them have antecedents in the debate over the original creation of NATO in the late 1940's. Many of today's opponents have invoked George F. Kennan's recent judgment that NATO expansion would constitute "the most fateful error of Ameri-

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can policy in the entire post-cold-war era"; whether they know it or not, Kennan, the intellectual father of the cold-war strategy of "containment," also opposed the North Atlantic treaty when it was first put forward.

Just as, today, the Eisenhower group warns against having to defend countries with "serious border and national-minority problems," so in the late 1940's Senator William Jenner asked whether joining a North Atlantic pact would not compel us "to accept all the ancient grudges of our wards." Just as James Chace seeks some larger European-security organization, so in 1948 did Hamilton Fish Armstrong, a predecessor as editor of *Foreign Affairs*, advocate "a move to strengthen the United Nations as a whole rather than to underwrite a group of its members."

The issue of costs and burdens is likewise a familiar one. *Newsweek* reported in 1949 that while "most Senators favored the pact in principle," the issue was, "Could the United States afford it? [That] question was by far the [most] pressing." And fears of Russia's reaction were also on many minds, with Senator Robert Taft warning that "if Russia sees itself ringed about gradually by so-called defensive arms, . . . it may decide that the arming of Western Europe, regardless of its present purpose, looks to an attack upon Russia."

NATO's success over 40-odd years makes such arguments seem foolish in retrospect. Although that hardly guarantees the foolishness of similar arguments today, most of them do prove weak upon examination.

Take the question of costs. The Clinton administration, which circulated high figures back in 1994 when it was seeking to deflect pressure for enlargement, now says that the costs to the U.S. will amount to only $150 million to $200 million a year for twelve years (on the assumption that we will be footing 15 percent of the estimated bill). This figure, which is far less than the American share of other NATO expenditures, has invited derision. Other estimates—such as those of the Rand Corporation and the Congressional Budget Office—suggest that the total costs of expansion may be two or three times higher than the administration's figures and that the U.S. share will also be higher. But even if so, the American contribution would amount to no more than $1 billion or so a year. Measured against the total U.S. outlay for national security, not to mention the outlay for myriad things less important than national security, this is small beer.

Besides, the history of national-security expenditures amply proves the adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The NATO operation to restore peace in Bosnia has cost the United States some $6 to $7 billion in its first year and a half; it would have cost much less to take timely action to nip the Bosnian war in the bud. The expansion of NATO can be counted on to forestall other Bosnias to come.

Even in a narrow economic sense, the costs of expansion may be offset by returns. When the North Atlantic treaty was first under consideration, the strategist Bernard Brodie argued that "only by the promise of security . . . could the West European states make the efforts necessary to their social, political, and economic salvation." And thus it happened. European recovery became, indeed, one of the building blocks of America's own postwar prosperity; today, besides competing with us, Europe provides markets and products, investment opportunities and capital on which America battens. By the same token, the spread of security to Central Europe can be expected to bring in its wake a prosperity from which all will benefit.

The fears that NATO will be diluted through expansion are also misplaced, at least in this initial round. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic are all working seriously to modernize their military forces. Far from being weakened by them, NATO is likely to benefit from a transfusion of fresh blood from nations whose courage and love of freedom have been tempered in the struggle against Communism. This could be tonic in an alliance whose present members have lately exhibited a depressing flaccidity.

THE MORE important points raised by the critics concern the creation of new lines of division in Europe and the response of Russia. There is no denying that a distinction will exist between those within an expanded NATO and those outside. But that distinction would be far more invidious if NATO closed its rolls, drawing a line between a kind of hereditary aristocracy of the free, rich, and secure and the rest of Europe. Since that line would be nothing but a relic of the cold war, it would tend to confirm rather than to contradict the perception that the inherent mission of NATO was anti-Russian. By contrast, expanding NATO and affirming that it is open to still further expansion are actions that will replace a hard dividing line with an effaceable one.

By remaining open, NATO can also turn the widespread wish for inclusion to good use. There are already nine applicants in addition to the three now invited in, and more will follow. NATO has

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responded to the rush for admission by detailing a set of criteria and creating a kind of antechamber where the aspirants may queue up. The criteria include democracy, political and economic stability, an absence of unresolved border or national-minority conflicts, and a requisite level of physical infrastructure as well as financial and military assets. The prospect of NATO membership has already led to the formal resolution of old disputes between Hungary and Romania, Hungary and Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Germany, Romania and Ukraine, and Poland and Lithuania.

The antechamber itself is the Partnership for Peace (PFP), founded in 1994 as part of the Clinton administration's effort to deflect pressures for NATO expansion. In the ensuing years, PFP has created a surprisingly effective framework for states to cooperate with NATO whether or not they wish ultimately to join it. Currently there are 27 members: 14 of the 15 former Soviet republics, 11 other formerly Communist states of Eastern Europe or Yugoslavia, and 4 cold-war neutrals (Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland).

PFP members participate in military exercises with NATO and work toward making their forces congenial with NATO's. They also join in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, and even in "peace enforcement," as in Bosnia. While not enjoying the mutual-defense commitment that binds NATO members under Article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty, PFP members are promised that NATO will "consult" with them should they detect a threat to their security. In return, PFP members pledge to increase the "transparency" of their military activities and to take specific steps to assure democratic control of their armed forces. In addition, NATO has established separate coordination agreements with Russia and Ukraine even though both also belong to PFP.

Instead of keeping NATO cloistered as an exclusive club, these arrangements put the alliance at the center of a wider European-security architecture, thereby diminishing cause for concern both about "dividing lines" and about "gray areas." The most sensitive of these is Ukraine. Thanks to its size, location, culture, and history, an independent Ukraine constitutes a virtually insuperable barrier to the reconstruction of a Russian empire. But these same factors make the notion of including Ukraine in NATO especially sensitive. The cooperation agreement allows some squaring of the circle. Military liaison has been established, and joint maneuvers have been undertaken. The arrangement, though, is but a pale analogue of Russia's own, more comprehensive, agreement with NATO, and so Russia has little cause to object.

Will expansion, nevertheless, have a deleterious effect on Russia's evolution? While all polls suggest that the Russian public is relatively indifferent on the matter, the Russian political class has been broadly opposed to NATO expansion. This includes even many democrats motivated, in part, by concern for the way the issue could be exploited by xenophobes and nationalists, and also by a seemingly genuine fear of Western intentions.

In reality, of course, Russia has no reason to fear. Even during the cold war, when the Soviet Union was defined as NATO's enemy, the grand strategy and military doctrines of the West were always defensive in nature. All the less does NATO today have any designs against a Russia that is no longer its enemy. The notion that pushing NATO's borders east will allow a jumping-off point for an invasion of Russia is laughable in an age when NATO's dominant member, the United States, went through paroxysms of anguish and had to secure a writ from the UN Security Council before it could bring itself to invade Haiti.

WHERE RUSSIAN opposition to NATO expansion is not based on paranoia, it may arise from a lingering nostalgia for empire or from the hope of once again carving out a Slavic sphere of influence. But the largest factor may be simple confusion, reflecting Russia's failure so far to sort out its national interests as a normal state rather than as the heart of a totalitarian, multinational, messianic empire. The fact that such top leaders as President Boris Yeltsin, General Aleksandr Lebed, and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev have all publicly reversed themselves on the NATO issue is symptomatic of this larger state of confusion.

Here, the West does have a useful role to play, and some lessons can be learned from our experience in Bosnia. Throughout the early stages of that conflict, Russia presented itself as the patron of the Serbs, over and over again forestalling Western action, exercising its veto in the Security Council, and warning NATO against undertaking air strikes or troop deployments. Finally, in August and September 1995, NATO brushed aside these warnings and carried out its one significant bombing campaign, which, despite protests from Russian officials all the way up to Yeltsin, helped pave the way for the Dayton peace agreement. When NATO then decided to deploy thousands of peacekeepers, Russia was invited to participate but refused. In the end, however, a 1,000-member

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Russian contingent did join the peacekeepers, under a Russian deputy commander and outside the NATO structure. By all accounts, these Russians have performed their mission responsibly, and to judge from the statements of Russian commanders and occasional reports in the Russian media, they have furnished a small source of pride for the Russian military.

What this suggests is that we can respond to Russian sensitivities without necessarily yielding to Russian admonitions. A sustained dialogue with Russian political and military leaders might help them to see how little intrinsic conflict exists between their enlightened self-interest and ours. It was in pursuit of just such a middle ground that NATO signed a "founding act" with Russia to create permanent consultative mechanisms housed within NATO headquarters. This agreement has aroused alarm even among some supporters of NATO enlargement like Henry Kissinger, who worries that now "all discussions within NATO . . . will be influenced by Russian participants whose objectives cannot possibly be the defense of NATO territory." It is true that the NATO countries at times were susceptible to various kinds of Soviet pressure and influence; but influence is not a one-way street, and in today's circumstances it is the Russians who may well prove the more susceptible party.

Finally: should American boys be asked to die for Danzig? Sadly, experience teaches us that America would find it almost impossible under any circumstances to remain apart from a European war that threatened Danzig (now Poland's Gdansk) or Prague or Budapest. Of the four major wars we have fought in this century—the two world wars, Korea, and Vietnam—every one was a "foreign" conflict from which we had resolved to stay aloof. The best way to keep Americans from dying for Danzig or its neighbors is to keep these cities themselves out of the shadow of war, and the best way to do that is by embracing them in NATO.

But if so, why *not* also bring Ljubljana, Tallinn, and Bucharest under NATO's protective cover? The answer to that is prudence. NATO's ability to extend an umbrella depends on the new members' ability to contribute to their own defense. Its ability to renew itself upon the foundations of shared principle depends on the new members' democratic credentials. Its ability to expand without changing its character depends on digesting new members gradually. The decision to offer an initial invitation to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic strikes the right balance. It constitutes an important and necessary step, although not a final one, in adapting the structures of American and European security to the lifting of the Iron Curtain.

"I RATHER LIKED NATO the way it was," writes Thomas Friedman. But that NATO was born of the changes that shook Europe in the late 1940's, and Europe is changing again today. The real question is: what will be *America's* place in this new Europe? From the point of view of the skeptics, the American role should be residual. Other institutions, whether OSCE or the European Union, can emerge as the main institutions of European politics, and NATO can be allowed to wane or, what will amount to the same thing, remain static. But there is a contrary view, which is that, *mutatis mutandis*, the safest bet for European peace and security is to keep America at the center.

Europe is one of history's most fruitful civilizations, but in 1914 it collapsed catastrophically, yielding total war, Communism, fascism, and Nazism. The surviving democracies, while keeping European values alive, nevertheless pursued suicidal policies of appeasement. When the continent finally emerged from the maelstrom of a second total war, its prospects were bleak indeed. What saved it was America's decision to break with its own traditions and become a European power.

This was not an American idea, but a British one, first aired by Winston Churchill in his 1946 speech at Fulton, Missouri. That speech is best remembered for the phrase "Iron Curtain," but its main point was to beckon America into a close postwar alliance with Britain. Two years later, another British official, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, came up with the idea of a North Atlantic pact, which became a reality in NATO. Together, NATO and the Marshall Plan inaugurated a kind of Pax Americana in Europe under which the continent has enjoyed over a half-century without a war among its powers, the longest such stretch since the Middle Ages.

With the cold war over, is it not time for Europe to stand on its own feet? Owen Harries, the editor of the *National Interest*, is an opponent of NATO expansion who believes America should "leave Europe to the Europeans." His advice was followed in 1991 in Yugoslavia, when Washington and the European Union alike agreed that the moment had come for the EU to demonstrate its capacity for independent action. ("This is the hour of Europe, not of the Americans," declared the leader of the EU's 1991 mission to Belgrade.) As we all know, the Yugoslav crisis ended up revealing Europe's continuing inability to act without American leadership. In the words of Joschka Fischer, the leader

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of Germany's Green party, which leaned toward pacifism until absorbing the lessons of Bosnia, "Europe has proved incapable of building its own common defense. . . . Only the Americans can provide the 'big stick' to enforce the peace of Europe."

It is not only America's muscle, however, but also its broader vision that Europe cannot do without. Why, for example, has the EU lagged behind NATO in opening the way to new members? European bodies, as NATO Secretary General Javier Solana recently put it, tend to get hung up on "the price of tomatoes." Nor is this the limit of European parochialism. The U.S. devised the Marshall Plan, proffering large gifts of money on the condition of European cooperation, in order to induce the Europeans to look beyond nationalism. Today, the EU may seem to be going us one better by heading down the path toward a single currency; but the EU's approach to European integration, which puts "deepening" ahead of "broadening," also threatens to create a new divide, with rich and Christian nations on the one side and poor and Muslim ones on the other. The former Belgian Prime Minister, Wilfried Martens, put it plainly: "Turkey is no candidate for EU membership, neither now nor later. It is a European Union that we are building." Here, then, is another reason why NATO must be the essential cornerstone of the new Europe.

This is not to say that NATO can go on defining itself exactly as it did in the days of the Soviet threat. A pledge to stand together against an attack on any one of its members may remain at the heart of things, but NATO cannot be *only* a mutual-defense pact, if it ever was. Indeed, Ernest Bevin, the organization's inventor, saw it as "a sort of spiritual federation of the West," and the North Atlantic treaty spelled out the purposes of the founding states in terms no less grand: "To safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law," and to seek "the preservation of peace and security."

Fulfilling these purposes in today's circumstances, when NATO is no longer pressed by a single overarching foe, will require adjustments. In addition to remaining open to new members, these include a greater emphasis on democracy and a broader range of missions. But much more than its ability to make these adjustments, the future success of NATO depends crucially on the continued leadership of the United States. For to expand NATO means to keep both it *and* America at the center of European politics.

FOR THE United States, assuming a commitment to the defense of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic means turning away from the isolationist temptations that have made themselves felt in the aftermath of the cold war. What is in this for us? In 1949, the North Atlantic treaty signified a complete about-face from the tradition of eschewing "entangling alliances." Although the obligations were in theory mutual, America, being much the most powerful of the partners, put up far more than it got in return. Nevertheless, though the bargain may have been uneven, this bold policy eventually brought us the ultimate prize of statecraft—victory without having to fight. The lesson for today is that to assure our own safety, we need to exert rather than to husband our unique power.

In 1949, no one foresaw how NATO would work. U.S. officials viewed it as an analogue to the Marshall Plan, a temporary measure until the Europeans could resume responsibility for their own security. Few, if any, foresaw that the North Atlantic treaty would soon spawn its own elaborate organization, the "O" in the NATO we have come to know so well. Similarly, no one can see with pellucid clarity how NATO will work in the new, undivided Europe. We can be confident, however, that a harmonious Europe, tightly linked to America, will not only be a great good in itself but will offer us the best platform from which to face, in other regions of the world, whatever challenges lie ahead.

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Mr. Bellow's Planet

Hillel Halkin

SAUL BELLOW'S new novella, the critics agree, is not one of his major works. As James Wood put it in the *New Republic*, *The Actual*,* while having "its own nervous perfection," is "slight . . . a ricochet from a talent that has already hit many targets." From a writer, now eighty-two years old, who won the 1976 Nobel prize for literature and has given us much of the best American fiction of our time, one is thankful even for a ricochet.

The Actual, however, is not so slight as to be utterly transparent. On its second page is a sentence that is likely to puzzle a reader unsteeped in Bellow's work. The speaker is the book's narrator, Harry Trellman, a middle-aged, divorced Chicago businessman. A man who has read much and thought much, Trellman remarks, in no apparent context:

> A man's road back to himself is a return from his spiritual exile, for that is what a personal history amounts to—exile.

Uncertain what to make of this, the reader reads on in the hope of eventual enlightenment. Like Bellow's early novella, *Seize The Day* (1956), *The Actual* takes place in the course of a single morning and afternoon, during which we follow Trellman through a series of memories and encounters. Two other main characters appear in these. One of them, Sigmund Adletsky, is an aged multimillionaire who has retained Trellman as an adviser. The other is Trellman's old high-school sweetheart, Amy Wustrin, with whom he has kept in touch over the years. Amy is now the Adletskys' interior decorator and the divorced wife of Trellman's deceased friend Jay Wustrin—who, as Trellman says, "married the only woman I had ever loved and made an utter fuck-up of their life together."

In the course of this half-day, we are privy to conversations between Trellman and Adletsky, and between Adletsky and Amy; to a meeting, attended by Amy, between Mr. and Mrs. Adletsky and a raffishly wealthy couple by the name of Heisinger; and, finally, to a trip made by Trellman and Amy to the cemetery to attend Jay Wustrin's reburial (a consequence of Jay's buffoonish choice of a gravesite). When the body is back in the ground, Trellman relates: "I took Amy by the hand and said, 'This may not be the moment for a marriage offer. It won't be my first error with you. But I've never felt more connected to you than I do now, and I hope you'll have me.'"

These lines, the concluding ones of the book—Amy's response to them goes unrecorded—come as a mild surprise; for although Trellman has told us of his continued romantic feelings toward Amy and of

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his regret at not having married her when they were young (his "first error," made because "I wasn't about to join the middle class for Amy's sake and be a petty bourgeois"), nowhere has he hinted that he is planning, after all these years, to propose to her.

Nor, at *The Actual*'s end, has any more light been shed on Trellman's remark about "spiritual exile." Whatever he meant by it remains unlocated in his life. It is a theme that he—a "first-class noticer," as Adletsky calls him, if also by his own admission a man "reluctant to put myself on record"—has not come back to.

But Saul Bellow is too meticulous a novelist simply to leave us without a clue. The one he provides comes toward the story's end, when Trellman tells Amy in the cemetery:

> Actually Jay was a generous friend. He never forgot my birthday. He made me fine gifts—a beautiful set of Jowett's Plato, and *The Decline and Fall* in an old edition. I still own them, read them. I occasionally try to tell people what's in them.

Amy, who thinks Harry is overintellectual, has just described herself to him as "not one of those women who are born to be deep . . . I have a high-average IQ, that's all," and is not about to be drawn into a discussion of books, let alone Roman history or Greek philosophy. "Tell me about the Burma money," she replies, trying to steer Trellman back to the topic of a shady business deal that he and Jay were once involved in. The Plato she leaves to us.

And it is with Plato that the haunting image of the soul's exile in this world enters Western thought. Coming from a preexistent elsewhere with perfect knowledge of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness, of "knowledge absolute in existence absolute," as Benjamin Jowett's marvelous Victorian translation has it, the soul, we are told by Plato's Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, enters the "living tomb" of the mortal body and "sinks beneath the double load of forgetfulness and vice." Eons must elapse "before the soul can return to the place whence she came, for she can not grow her wings in less; only the soul of a philosopher, guileless and true, or the soul of a lover" can fly the nets of imprisonment sooner.

The *Phaedrus* is a paean to Eros; for next to the philosopher, who attains "the recollection of those things which our soul once saw when in company with God," the lover alone, seeing the "godlike face or form" of the beloved, feels "a shudder run through him and some 'misgiving' of a former world steal over him." The philosopher sees clearly, declares Socrates, the lover "but through a glass dimly"; but, among men forgetful of the things of the other world, he at least gets a fleeting glimpse.

And Harry Trellman, in his slow and methodical way, has been a lover. "I had fallen in love [with Amy]," he tells us,

> when I was an adolescent schoolboy. The tremendous feeling came, as they say, "we know not whence." Everything—but every thing—was as before. There were still kitchens with onions and potato peels in the sink, and streetcars grinding on the rails. . . . I couldn't have expected Amy to mark time while I was inching [back] toward her. It was a lengthy intelligence job for me, cracking one cipher after another. Held up here for a week, there for a decade. I always knew where she was located and what she was up to, more or less.

Although he has still not exactly gone on record, it is that Jowettian "whence" that gives Trellman away. In reading Saul Bellow, indeed, especially his later fiction, one sometimes suspects that one is reading a closet Platonist. The soul's exile is the grand if frequently submerged theme of many of his novels and stories—novels and stories that on the surface, as a blurb on one of his books says, "crackle with smart, urban American energy."

Although Bellow's critics have not, on the whole, paid much attention to this aspect of his work, they have not neglected it entirely. Often, in commenting on his high-temperature fusion of the grit and glitter of contemporary American life with the strivings of the inner self, they have discussed his preoccupation with the latter in terms of "mysticism." Expressing a common perception about Bellow's fiction, for instance, the critic Edmond Schraepen has noted how his most overtly "mystical" novel, *Humboldt's Gift* (1975), "reveals thematic antitheses which are related to a basic opposition between the distracting world and the transcendental."

Still, there has been a tendency to minimize this "mysticism" of Bellow's and to view its imagery as a literary device, used to express his characters' sense of alienation from a materialistic civilization. Bellow himself, as the critics have observed, has encouraged this way of looking at things, undercutting his characters' belief in a higher reality by ironically or parodically having them gravitate to the weird and the exotic. Charlie Citrine, for example, the highly intelligent narrator of *Humboldt's Gift*, is nuttily attracted to the doctrines of the Austrian spiritualist Rudolf Steiner (1865-1921), who wrote such books as *The Occult Significance of Blood* and founded a

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movement called anthroposophy that has its followers to this day. A Plato, Steiner was not.

And "Platonism" is in any case not quite the right word for it. The conviction, as Wordsworth put it in his "Ode On Intimations of Immortality," that "our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting" had already overflowed the bounds of Platonism in antiquity. It kept to them in the icy raptures of Plotinus; it spilled into new and ever-shifting channels in the Hellenistic mystery religions, in gnosticism, in the Catholic church, in rabbinic Judaism, in medieval Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophy, in Sufism and Kabbalah, in the neoplatonists and alchemists of the Renaissance, in Hasidism, in Protestant mystics like Jakob Boehme and George Fox, in—but perhaps here the soul itself began its contemporary shrinkage to a mere metaphor—romanticism and New England transcendentalism. It has run dry, or into the stagnant puddles of religious kitsch and the underground caverns of bizarre cults, in the anti-dualistic climate of our own century, in which the very word "soul" has become archaic or a quaint poetic synonym for the self, the belief in what it once signified now exposed as an elementary error in logic.

BELLOW, IN any case, is probably fonder of the word "soul" than any major English writer since D.H. Lawrence or W.B. Yeats. Appearing fitfully in his earlier books, it first strikes one by its prominence in *Humboldt's Gift*. Von Humboldt Fleisher, the gifted and alcoholic poet of the title, is obsessed, his friend Charlie Citrine tells us, by "the perennial human feeling that there was an original world, a home-world, which was lost. . . . He spoke of our species as castaways." And Citrine himself, though he feels that he has betrayed his friend's high spiritual purposes by selling out to middlebrow America, also has such intimations. He remarks:

> More than ever I believed that the soul with its occasional glimmers of the Good couldn't expect to get anywhere in a single lifetime. . . . A single span [of life on earth] could only make virtue desperate. Only a fool would try to reconcile the Good with one-shot mortality.

Like Charlie Citrine, Ijah Brodsky in Bellow's 1984 story, "Cousins," reflects:

> We enter the world without prior notice, we are manifested before we can be aware of manifestation. An original self exists or, if you prefer, an original soul.

Start looking for them and you find such allusions throughout Bellow's later work, often in mere snippets of narrative or phrasing embedded in the surrounding detail like the clues of a treasure hunt. Albert Corde, the central protagonist of *The Dean's December* (1982), has read the *Phaedrus* many times and writes an article comparing the city of Chicago to the cave of Plato's famous allegory. Arthur Sammler of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) wants, "with God, to be free from the bondage of the ordinary and the finite." Kenneth Trachtenberg, the narrator of *More Die Of Heartbreak* (1987) and the biographer of his uncle Benn Crader, a renowned scientist and "Citizen of Eternity," speaks of the Socratic "daemon" or "inner spirit" within us. "My soul played the role of sitter in my body," says the narrator of *The Bellarosa Connection* (1989). The narrator of "Something To Remember Me By" (1990) mentions his "lifelong absorption in or craze for further worlds." And in a much earlier work, Henderson of *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) lifts an unacknowledged line from Wordsworth when he describes the child sitting next to him on an airplane as "trailing clouds of glory." ("From God, who is our home," goes Wordsworth's next line.) One could go on.

They are almost always intellectuals, these protagonists of Bellow's—if generally, like Harry Trellman, self-taught ones—and they have a sense of being strangers in this world. And yet typically, they do not hang out with others of their kind. They prefer the company of businessmen, promoters, politicians, mobsters, lawyers, scam artists, slightly mad scientists, disreputable relatives, oddballs, highly sexual women, often on the make. They are drawn to wealth and power, the glitz of expensive clubs, hotels, restaurants, offices. Though they have ideas, often "mystical," about everything, what they think about most is power, money, sex, ambition, the brawls and bruises of the human marketplace. They are, as Blake said of Eternity, in love with the productions of Time.

Repelled by them, too. Arthur Sammler, erudite European, Holocaust survivor, loathes the gaudy carnival of late-20th-century New York. Albert Corde, dean of journalism, discovers upon returning to Chicago from abroad that it "looked as if the Antichrist had already descended on it," its "engineers, advertisers, insurers, bankers, and stockbrokers" inhabiting a jungle in which they were "not animals fighting honorably for survival, they were money maniacs, they were deeply perverted, corrupt. No jungle, more like a garbage dump."

Repelled—yet still drawn. Corde has "taken it upon himself to pass Chicago through his own

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soul. A mass of data, terrible, murderous. It was no easy matter to put such things through." Sammler is mesmerized by a pickpocket on the Broadway bus, a "powerful Negro in a camel's-hair coat, dressed with extraordinary elegance," and is horrified to see him beaten even after he has exposed himself to Sammler sexually and mugged a young man in front of him:

> The clothing, the shades, the sumptuous colors, the barbarous-majestical manner. He was probably a mad spirit. But mad with an idea of noblesse. And how much Sammler sympathized with him.

Well, why not? The soul, the wise old Diotima warns Socrates in *The Symposium*, yearning for the home-world, "turns to beautiful forms . . . at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul." Far more even than the senses, the soul worships beauty, grace, vitality, power. Bellow's fiction teems with such sublimely suckered souls. As Kenneth Trachtenberg says of his uncle Benn Crader, the Citizen of Eternity who in *More Die of Heartbreak* disastrously marries the (gorgeously) wrong woman, "He has imaginative powers that let him see things that others don't. . . . But even this does not prevent his being a fool." And what most makes Crader a fool is sex—less the physical than the Platonic lure of it:

> Emotional types, loving hearts like my uncle, exuberant high-energy characters, easily agitated, needy, greedy, they can't see why one high gift should not be followed by another, by a succession of gifts. The demand then was for a sharer, a charming woman, such a woman as Swedenborg describes—made by God to instruct a man, to lead him to the exchange of souls. Maybe to teach him, as Diotima taught Socrates about love.

BUT DOES Bellow believe this Platonic stuff? His literary career actually starts with a qualified rejection of it. Joseph, the surnameless protagonist of Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man* (1944), declines as a modern man to use the words "spirit" and "soul," though he too feels banished from a higher existence, imagining men as "the feeble-minded children of angels." He prefers "mind," or "the self that we must govern. It is our humanity that we are responsible for it. . . ."

But responsible to whom? For a soul, conceived traditionally, one is responsible to God. If our private self, however, unlike our public personality, is that representation of ourselves to ourselves that we alone must live with, to whom or to what can we be responsible for it?

When in the age of romanticism the soul becomes the self, this question is indeed what it becomes. The romantic self is a soul responsible only to itself, for—as Keats said when he wrote that "this world is a vale of soul-making"—it is self-made. And much of Saul Bellow's early work—*Dangling Man*, *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Henderson the Rain King*—is concerned with such soul-making, with the romantic construction of the self. More precisely, it is about that construction in America, the best and worst vale ever for the project—vast, inchoate, endlessly free, endlessly diverse and stimulating, containing the greatest supply of soul-making materials ever available and therefore the one most likely to distract the user from his task.

Joseph is defeated at this task. "I am no longer to be held accountable for myself," he declares at *Dangling Man*'s end as he receives his wartime call-up from the army. "I am grateful for that. I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination." By contrast, the picaresque Augie March, as irrepressibly zestful for life as Joseph is wary of it, throws himself back into the fray, gulping down America as if it were a brew of psychic vitamins. And the ex-pig farmer Henderson, a kindly, Keats-reading, physical giant of a man who is working on a self as large, finds even America too cramped a work place and sets out for Africa to slake his thirst for experience.

Henderson constantly craves the new, the ever more real; his self, to use the language of our own contemporary culture, the culture of the romantic self popularized, is continually growing. In fact, it is an entire growth industry in itself. Yet the more it grows, and the more, like the figure reaching for the moon in Blake's illustration, it cries, "I want!" the more the endlessness of the task exasperates him. Finally, it wears him out. Perhaps that is why, as his story draws to a close, he tries out a new—an old—metaphor. I have already mentioned the scene. A child is sitting next to him on an airplane:

> As for this kid resting against me . . . why, he was still trailing his cloud of glory. God knows, I [had] dragged mine on as long as I could till it got dingy, mere tatters of gray fog. . . . You could never convince me that this was for the first time.

Henderson, in a word, gives up the idea of the romantic self and returns to the Platonic idea of the soul. For the self-in-progress can never be finished; the soul—although it may take a lifetime to recollect it—is already complete. This moment

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represents a kind of turning point, or point of turning back, in Bellow's work. Soul now replaces self in his fiction, as it gradually does (so we must infer) in the life of Harry Trellman in *The Actual*.

HARRY GAVE Amy Wustrin up in the first place, he tells us, because "of the ordinary middle-class character of [the] connection," which made him see "the feelings I had for her as sheer kitsch. And kitsch didn't sort well with the advanced forms of personal development I was after." For the self that seeks, like Henderson's, "personal development," the greatest fear is of standing still. Harry had not wanted to become like Jay Wustrin and his friends,

> run-of-the-mill products of our mass democracy . . . satisfied to pile up money or seduce women, to copulate, thrive in the sack as the degenerate children of Eros, male but not manly, and living, the men and women alike, on threadbare ideas, without beauty, without virtue, without the slightest independence of the spirit.

For Harry himself is a regenerate son of Eros. In Amy's not particularly spectacular beauty, the chunky earthiness of her "flesh-and-blood mortality," he has come to see, not the sexual opportunity that first attracted Jay Wustrin, but a glimmer of something else, something that "the years between, with their crises and wars and presidential campaigns, all the transformations of the present age, have had no power to change." He is indeed on the constant lookout for such glimmers, straining with their aid, as he has phrased it, to "crack the cipher" of reality, unable to "rid myself of the habit of watching for glimpses of higher capacities and incipient powerful forces." It is a trait, Trellman muses, that he perhaps acquired in the Jewish orphanage that his mother put him in as a child,

> where I was taught (but at the time did not agree) that the Jews were a chosen people. This may be the nucleus of my belief that the powers of our human genius are present where one least expects them. . . . And very possibly it is a carryover from some vestigial Jewish impulse.

Although Harry may be mixing his Hebraism and his Hellenism, he is doing nothing that both Western civilization and Jewish religious culture have not done extensively before him; Bellow, certainly, has always seemed comfortable with the mix. In fact, the sense of utter ease that Bellow's fiction has projected about both its Jewish and its non-Jewish affiliations—or, if one likes, about being both a Jew and an American—is what has made him, despite the rapid pulse of his prose, the calmest major Jewish writer of our century. Kenneth Trachtenberg may ask about his Uncle Benn's fascination with "Ideal Beauty," "What are Jews doing, getting into all this Greek stuff, anyway?" Harry Trellman, like Bellow himself, is unworried by the impurity of his intellectual bloodlines.

What has worried him until now is the specter of stasis, repetition, boredom. "[Even] Churchill in his final years was maddened by boredom and prayed for death," he tells Adletsky with a kind of reflective horror. Such a prospect has struck him as intolerable, a living death. And what would marrying Amy be if not the greatest repetition of all—no, worse than repetition, regression—the retreat to a former self? It is only when Trellman comes to view this self as a soul that marriage to Amy becomes possible. For if a self is stunted by repetition, a soul is fulfilled by it. It grows by repossession rather than expansion.

Harry does not propose to Amy very romantically. There is not even the obligatory "I love you" that seems to end every other conversation in America these days. But despite the flatness of his language, he is talking from a deep place. Several minutes before he pops the question, he remarks to her:

> I have a most basic lifelong feeling toward you, Amy. It's something not possible to conceal from a skillful observer. In my feelings, I've always had an open direct line to you. It's from my nature, not from my character. My character is compromised. But not even a compromised—okay, a mutilated—character could change my nature.

Translate "character" as "personality," and "nature" as what Ijah Brodsky calls the "original self" or "original soul," and what Harry Trellman is offering Amy, to put it as precisely as possible, is a Platonic relationship.

BUT DOES Bellow *believe* this stuff? Who knows? If he were to give you an hour of his time, you still might not know. He might not want to put himself on record. When something works for a writer, there are reasons for keeping it unclarified.

It is easy enough to understand the poetic pull of such imagery. No matter how we try getting used to the place, the feeling of not being at home in this world, of having our real home elsewhere, is probably as common in our own times as in antiquity. The difference is that we are embarrassed by it. We think we are experiencing something else—a personality

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disturbance, or a longing for the cradle or the womb.

In my student days I spent a year reading English in Cambridge (England, not Massachusetts). My college ran on the old system; you attended what lectures you pleased and met desultorily with a tutor to discuss things. Since I was interested in the poetry of William Blake, I was assigned to tutorials with a woman named Kathleen Raine, who had written a book on him.

Kathleen Raine was a poet herself. The other day I opened and read, for the first time in 35 years, a book of her verse that I bought that year in London, and so I can even say that she was a good poet.

What seemed most distinctive about her, though, was her being not a poet but a Platonist. An honest-to-goodness one. She read the Socratic dialogues, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus as her spiritual handbooks. She was not, as far as I could see, a fundamentalist. She did not take literally the Myth of Er or the allegory of the charioteer in the *Phaedrus*. But she was a believer. She thought our souls came from elsewhere and were in exile. She was the first and last real Platonist I ever met.

She read Blake as though he were a Platonist, too. I could not agree with her on that. Blake was a radical monist, so radical that it has taken most of the 20th century to catch up with him; his quarrel with Plato struck me as deep and uncompromising. But I did not argue with Kathleen Raine about Blake. I was too young for that, and too easily intimidated by anyone her age, let alone by a woman who knew the source and destination of her soul. Of all that she said to me that year, I remember with exactitude only a few words. I cannot recall what we were talking about, but they were: "Well, of course. You spend the first half of your life working your way into your incarnation, and the second half working your way out of it."

Over the years, I have sometimes pondered that remark. As I get older, I begin to think that I understand it, at least on my own terms—which are almost certainly not Kathleen Raine's.

Young people are natural romantics, although many fail to follow their natures. The craving for experience when one is young is insatiable. One cannot get enough of it. One never knows what may come in handy in making a self. One accumulates all one can, crams oneself with whole Chicagos.

But the young have to learn that the self must eventually, like an examination paper, be brought to some kind of closure; it must be submitted in as finished a state as possible. Not to the world—that will judge us by our personalities and our actions; even the most transparent of selves remains largely hidden to it. To believe, like Joseph, that the self will be judged, but not by the world, is, I sometimes think, to believe in something like a soul.

I am not sure that these are Bellow's terms. He appears to have gone beyond them. True, unlike the word "soul," the word "God" rarely appears in his work; it is missing, like the second line from Wordsworth. But in our age of religious blah-blah, this may be merely a sign of decent reticence.

In any event, not only does Harry Trellman not talk about God, he does not talk about souls, either. Bellow leaves this in *The Actual* to Amy Wustrin. Reminiscing to Madge Heisinger about her ex-husband Jay and his penchant for quoting literature, she says:

> He memorized bits when he was putting the make on girls. After we were married, I looked up all his source books. The passages were underlined, and just from Chapter One. He never read an entire book in his whole life. Here is a sample: "The face of man is the most amazing thing in the life of the world. Another world shines through it. . . . Through the face we apprehend not the bodily life of a man, but the life of his soul."

Madge, a tough lady who also knew Jay, replies: "He knew better than to lay such shit on me. Who wrote it?"

But Amy simply repeats, still musing over Jay's duplicity: "Underlined with a ruler, in red. Just Chapter One. The rest he never looked at."

In the mouth of a slick operator like Jay Wustrin, this passage, whether a real quotation or something made-up, has Bellow again parodying himself—or at least those of his characters who talk this way. But the parody is complicated. For one thing, Amy, who is as emotionally honest and level-headed as they come, has taken the trouble to learn the words by heart; whatever use Jay has put them to, they speak to her. For another, it is Harry Trellman's opinion, voiced elsewhere in the novella, that his friend Jay "approached all the right things for all the wrong reasons."

This may be Bellow's way of warning readers away from essays like this one. Still, *The Actual*, too, has its cipher that needs to be cracked. Slight as it is, there is something compactly summarizing about it. Affable, even sweet-tempered, it shows a man at the edge of a neatly worked-out incarnation.

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Observations

The Worst Decision Since "Dred Scott"?

Wilfred M. McClay

Few pieces of congressional legislation in recent years have aroused less initial controversy than the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), a 1993 bill designed to overturn a Supreme Court ruling that appeared to many to threaten religious liberty. An almost surreal array of leaders from across the full spectrum of American religious institutions and practices—established and novel, liberal and orthodox, mainstream and fringe—endorsed the bill, and some of the bitterest antagonists in today's culture wars, including diehard secularists, were willing to lay down their arms and make common cause in promoting it. RFRA then swept through Congress like a prairie fire, encountering only three nays in the Senate and none in the House. The ever-attuned President Clinton enthusiastically signed it into law.

That RFRA touches upon issues of overwhelming importance to many Americans may help explain the widespread alarm and even outrage this past summer when the Supreme Court, in a 6-3 decision, *City of Boerne* v. *Flores*, voted to strike it down. The normally staid *Christian Science Monitor*, whose mother church had supported RFRA, editorialized that the Court had "lobbed a figurative bomb into the middle of this nation's already-hot debate over religious rights." "Every church and synagogue, every religious person in America will be hurt by this decision," protested Reverend Oliver Thomas of the National Council of Churches, while David Saperstein of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations declared that the decision would "go down in history with *Dred Scott* and *Korematsu* among the worst mistakes this Court has ever made."

Politicians were not far behind, with Senator Orrin Hatch, the conservative Republican from Utah, declaring that "the Court has once again acted to push religion to the fringes of society" and Representative Charles Schumer, the liberal Democrat from New York, adding heatedly that *Flores* forces citizens "to choose between their government and their God." Most impressive of all, in some ways, was Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's passionate dissent in the case, which she read aloud from the bench to emphasize the strength of her contrary view.

Is *Flores* really as cataclysmic in its implications as the critics say? To answer this question requires a little background.

RFRA was, as I have mentioned, a direct legislative attempt to topple another controversial Court decision, *Employment Division* v. *Smith* (1990). In that case, the Court rebuffed the claim of two Oregon men who were seeking unemployment benefits; they had been fired from their drug-counseling jobs for using peyote, a hallucinogen, as part of what they maintained were "sacramental" rites. In writing for the majority in *Smith*, Justice Antonin Scalia repudiated the doctrine that government requires a "compelling interest" to burden the free exercise of religion afforded by the First Amendment. (The "compelling-interest" doctrine, itself first

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established in a 1963 case, had dramatically raised the barrier to any government interference with religious exercise.) Instead, Scalia allowed for the possibility that the free exercise of religion might be legitimately limited by a general law, so long as the limitation was an "incidental effect" rather than the product of a clear intent to target an individual or his faith.

To many observers, particularly those affiliated with some of the more prominent religious communities, Scalia's formulation seemed too dismissive of the claims of religious liberty. Their anger quickly gave rise to the strange-bedfellows' alliance that in turn produced RFRA, a measure explicitly designed to restore the more stringent standard.

Proponents of RFRA claimed at the time that it fell well within Congress's purview to pass this law, since the Fourteenth Amendment gives Congress the right to "enforce" the First Amendment at state and local levels. Yet the language of the Act itself sounded less like an enforcement provision than a proclamation of fundamental law. RFRA stipulated that in the absence of that famous compelling interest, "Government shall not substantially burden a person's exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability." These words, aimed specifically at Scalia's ruling in *Smith*, were a direct legislative rebuke of the Court.

That threw down a gauntlet. Since the task of constitutional interpretation has always belonged to the highest tribune of the judicial branch, it was hardly likely that the Court would submit to such a frontal raid on its powers and perquisites. And indeed the *Flores* decision, written by Justice Anthony Kennedy and joined by both the most liberal and the most conservative members of the Court, scarcely addressed itself to issues of religious liberty at all, focusing instead on RFRA's violation of the constitutional separation of powers, and its damaging effects upon federalism and state power.

In the majority opinion, Kennedy brushed aside any claim that the Act had been designed to correct a serious problem involving repression of religion. Rather, he argued, the law represented a substantive attempt to end-run the Court's decision in *Smith*. From the point of view of the Constitution, Congress had simply exceeded its powers. In the process, it had also begotten a dangerously "sweeping" and disproportionate Act, one likely to have countless unforeseen consequences, "displacing laws and prohibiting official actions of almost every description and regardless of subject matter."

ON THIS last point, Kennedy's view tends to be confirmed by an examination of the facts of *Flores*, a case that arose not out of any state-sponsored persecution of heretics but out of a lowly zoning dispute. St. Peter the Apostle Church, a Roman Catholic parish in Boerne, Texas, wished to expand its 74-year-old church building to accommodate a swelling congregation. But the church building, a mission-style structure of middling charm, was clearly protected by the city's 1991 historic-preservation ordinance. On that basis, Boerne's landmark commission and city council refused to issue a permit to make the desired alterations.

Of such conflicts are local politics made, and normally the conflicts are settled by a process of mutual accommodation that the world little notes nor long remembers. But with RFRA's provisions on the books, the church, and the Catholic Archdiocese which championed it, no longer had to accept even a partial defeat. Instead, it claimed it had been discriminated against, that the historic-preservation ordinance substantially burdened its congregants' free exercise of religion, and that the First Amendment had thereby been traduced.

This was, of course, opportunism of the most naked sort—but precisely the kind of behavior to which RFRA had opened the door. In the wake of the Act's passage, other cases like this one had begun to pop up in jurisdictions across the country. Prison inmates claimed the right to use drugs as part of their religious rituals; an Amish group in Wisconsin claimed, and won, an exemption from a requirement to post orange safety triangles on its members' horse-drawn buggies; a Presbyterian church in Washington, D.C., fought successfully to establish a food program for the homeless over the objections of city zoning officials.

Such cases opened the prospect that state and local governments would be rendered powerless to avert multiplying claims of "burdened" religious expression. Small wonder, then, that sixteen states joined with the city of Boerne in challenging RFRA. All of them faced the possibility of seeing their legal and regulatory structures undermined by religion's imperious claims—and of an ocean of litigation brought by those with sufficient enterprise and brass to try the "sacramental" angle when all else failed. Instead of alleviating public distrust of religion, RFRA was exacerbating it.

In passing RFRA, certainly, Congress seems to have given scant consideration to what it was setting loose. To the contrary, RFRA was one of those carelessly conceived, crowd-pleasing efforts that have become the legislative branch's *spécialité de la maison*. Seizing on a Good Thing and elevating it to an abstract status, sponsors of such legislation blithely ignore the probability that the single-minded pursuit of any Good Thing will inevitably come into conflict with the pursuit of another Good Thing, or foreclose the ability to sustain many other Good Things.

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Under RFRA, virtually any local law or regulation could be made vulnerable to the scrutiny of federal courts on the grounds that it unintentionally burdened religious exercise. This makes a potential mockery of American federalism, whose genius is to allow localities to fight these things out themselves. Indeed, after the Supreme Court handed down *Flores*, that is just what happened in the city of Boerne. Deprived of the fuel of RFRA, the Archdiocese and the city council had no choice but to sit down and settle their differences; in August, two months after the Supreme Court ruling, they did so.

BUT ASIDE from all the practical benefits of relying whenever possible on concrete, local precedents and traditions, there are also other considerations, flowing from the fact that "religion" is such an exceptionally difficult concept to define. Although the First Amendment establishes a rough baseline, it goes no further than that, and there are good grounds for distrusting any particular court's universal formulation—particularly if that formulation is to carry legal weight. Precisely because a satisfactory one-size-fits-all definition cannot be found, there is every reason to prefer the rough diversity of understandings made possible by federal arrangements, which subdivide authority and power in ways that are closer to, and more respectful of, the actual communities and institutions in which genuine, well-established religious faiths are practiced.

RFRA moved matters in the opposite direction, threatening the establishment of a national standard for "religion" and the "burdening" thereof, just as the Department of Agriculture (USDA) does for levels of the E.-coli bacillus in the slaughterhouse. In particular, RFRA construed the concept of "burden" strictly in terms of "a *person's* exercise" (emphasis added), thereby leaving the clear impression that the free exercise of religion was primarily an individual matter. Such a presumption virtually ensured that, say, a Church of Marijuana, and any number of ersatz cults and exotic new revelations, could plausibly command an equal standing with established faiths.

Aside from its palpable absurdity, such a development would codify a false understanding of religion, which is not just another word for an individual's collected metaphysical musings. By implicitly defining religion in these terms, RFRA played directly into our pernicious tendency to emphasize the autonomous, unencumbered, and unhistorical self as the building block of social and political reality. This tendency was evinced memorably by the Court itself in its 1992 *Casey* abortion decision, which identified liberty as "the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

Given such proclivities at the highest levels of our legal culture, it is perhaps understandable that RFRA's drafters chose to couch its claims in the language of self-actualization and individual rights. But what such a formulation leaves utterly out of account is that religion is a social and institutional phenomenon, embodied in historically rooted communities of faith that not only share a highly elaborated and codified system of beliefs but embrace and transmit to others, children in particular, a discipline that reaches into the deepest crevices of their physical, mental, and moral lives. Unless religious communities are free to create and sustain a distinctive moral universe powerful and plausible enough to shape the souls of their adherents, religious liberty will devolve into little more than spiritual consumerism.

Of course, many of our mainstream religious leaders are themselves guilty of encouraging or pandering to just such consumerism, and of failing to transmit their own traditions faithfully. But the greatest *legal* danger to religious freedom in years to come will arise not from that quarter, or, for that matter, from the suppression of peyote-users and aspiring church architects. It will come from the more general erosion of the rights of private association at the hands of the very federal government that RFRA would have made into religion's USDA.

Religious liberty means very little unless religious communities have defensible boundaries. But it is not at all fanciful to imagine, for example, that RFRA could eventually have been invoked by embittered or opportunistic individuals to undermine the authority of their own denominations, on the grounds that these institutions imposed an orthodoxy that "burdened" religious exercise by failing, say, to affirm their life-style, or by prohibiting them from being ordained. By conceiving of religious liberty in strictly individual terms, RFRA contributed to the very problem it sought to solve.

If, in the next round of the battle, defenders of religious liberty raise a different banner, one that respects the integrity and independence of religious groups, and builds upon the unique advantages offered by a federal system, they will have a smaller, less diverse coalition to call upon. They will probably not be joined, as they were in 1993, by People for the American Way and the American Civil Liberties Union. But they will have a far better cause, and they may find a Court that is far more willing to listen to them.

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Music

An Unloved Romantic

Terry Teachout

Hector Berlioz is famous, but not popular. He is, in fact, the only great composer of the 19th century *never* to have been popular. To be sure, his best-known composition, the *Symphonie fantastique*, is part of the standard orchestral repertory, and his music has been championed by such noted conductors as Arturo Toscanini, Serge Koussevitzky, Sir Thomas Beecham, and Sir Colin Davis. But his large-scale works for chorus and orchestra—*Roméo et Juliette*, *La damnation de Faust*, *L'enfance du Christ*, and the *Requiem*—are heard only rarely in concert, while his operas are almost never staged by major houses. It is chiefly through recordings that in our age Berlioz has found an audience; even so, his admirers, though fervent, remain strikingly small in number.

No less striking is the long list of distinguished composers and critics who have had substantial reservations about the quality of Berlioz's music or have actively disliked it. Felix Mendelssohn, for example, dismissed it as "indifferent drivel"; Giuseppe Verdi, who described Berlioz as "greatly and subtly gifted," went on to say that he "lacked the calm and what I may call the balance that produce complete works of art"; Igor Stravinsky called his reputation as an orchestrator "highly suspect."

Berlioz was even less popular during his lifetime than today. In Paris, where he lived for his entire adult life, his orchestral music was, with rare exceptions, heard only at performances he organized and conducted himself. This may be partly attributed to the decadent state of French musical culture in the mid-19th century, which was wholly dominated by opera—most of it trashy, much of it even worse. But in part, it was owing to something else: unable to earn a living by composing, Berlioz wrote music criticism for the *Journal des débats*, one of the most influential newspapers in Paris, and he thereby antagonized the very people who might have helped get his works performed.

As it happens, however, Berlioz's literary career is of more than merely biographical interest: he was by far the most gifted among those composers of the first rank who have successfully doubled as professional writers. He contributed regularly to the *Journal des débats* from 1834 to 1863, publishing three best-selling collections of his critical essays, and his posthumous memoirs are now widely acknowledged to be a classic of 19th-century autobiography. So stylish a writer was Berlioz that he was long known less for his music than for his prose. Interest in his writing has remained high to this day, as can be seen by the fact that Hugh Macdonald's *Selected Letters of Berlioz*, which contains 481 of his 4,000-odd surviving letters, is one of the few recent volumes of its kind to have been brought out by a trade publisher rather than by an academic press.*

Macdonald, who is joint editor of the French-language edition of Berlioz's complete correspondence, has done an exemplary job of assembling this collection, the first to appear in English since 1966. It contains a representative, extensively annotated selection of letters drawn

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* Norton, 479 pp., $35.00.

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from the whole of the composer's long and eventful life and addressed to correspondents including Richard Wagner, Franz Liszt, Goethe, Balzac, Flaubert, Napoleon III, and Queen Victoria.

Like everything Berlioz wrote, his letters are irresistibly readable, and do more than any of his other writings, even the vivid memoirs, to illuminate his volatile personality. In the process, they also do much to explain why his music, for all its undeniable greatness, has consistently failed to please a wide public.

LOUIS-HECTOR BERLIOZ, the eldest of six children, was born in La Côte St. André, a village near Grenoble, in 1803. His father, a freethinking country doctor (he was the first Western physician to experiment with acupuncture), undertook the boy's education, teaching him Latin, geography, and music. As a result, Berlioz's early musical training was sketchy—unlike most composers, he never learned to play the piano, opting instead for the flute and guitar—and he heard little classical music other than that which he played and sang for himself.

Yet Berlioz had already begun composing by the time he was thirteen. At seventeen, when he went to Paris to study medicine, he was convinced that it would be a grave mistake to follow in his father's footsteps. Although he attended medical school for two years, he spent virtually all his spare time writing music, going to the opera, and studying composition at the Paris Conservatory. In 1824, he finally informed his father that his medical studies were at an end:

> I am being dragged involuntarily toward a magnificent career (there is no other epithet fitting for a career in the arts) and not toward my destruction. I believe I shall succeed, yes, I believe it, and considerations of modesty are no longer relevant. . . . That is my way of thinking, that is how I am, and nothing on this earth will change me.

Berlioz's very bourgeois family was understandably horrified by his decision, and his allowance was cut in an attempt to bring him to his senses. Instead of giving in, he enrolled as a full-time student at the Paris Conservatory, winning the Prix de Rome in 1830. By then, he had produced three works—the *Waverley* and *Francs-juges* overtures and the cantata *La mort de Cléopatre*—in which his mature style was unmistakably foreshadowed. During that same time, he saw Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, heard Beethoven's Third and Fifth Symphonies, and read Goethe's *Faust*, all of which inspired him to break free of the sterile neoclassicism that dominated official French art of the day.

Berlioz accomplished this goal in 1830 with the *Symphonie fantastique*, in which he cast off the conventions of traditional musical form to create a five-movement "episode in the life of an artist." The *Symphonie* purports to tell the story of his love for Harriet Smithson, a Shakespearean actress with whom he had become obsessed (and whom he married three years later). A long, irregularly phrased and accented melody—the *idée fixe*—is heard in all five movements, symbolizing the composer's obsession, and a program note explains to the listener precisely what each movement is meant to portray, from a fancy-dress ball to a witches' sabbath. The sound and texture of the *Symphonie fantastique* are as original as its form: the orchestration is strongly colored yet slender and transparent, and strict counterpoint is avoided save for ironic effect.

With the *Symphonie fantastique*, Berlioz emerged as the first composer fully to embody the expansive subjectivism of the Romantic movement. Liszt, who attended the premiere, subsequently arranged the work for solo piano and played it all over Europe; Robert Schumann wrote enthusiastically about the published version of Liszt's arrangement. Other progressive musicians readily acknowledged Berlioz as the fountainhead of musical Romanticism; they included Wagner, who wrote to Liszt, "In the present period we alone are on a par—that is, You, He, and I."

For the rest of his life, Berlioz wrote almost exclusively for orchestra, employing instrumental forces of unprecedented size. (The *Requiem*, composed in 1837, calls for an orchestra of 100 strings, 20 woodwinds, 12 horns, 16 timpani, and 4 antiphonal brass choirs.) Ambitious to a fault, he sought inspiration in the supreme masterpieces of literature, producing a choral symphony inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; an oratorio, *La damnation de Faust*, based on Goethe; and an opera, *Les Troyens*, based on Virgil's *Aeneid*.*

AS EXTRAVAGANT as Berlioz's music was his personality, and to this the letters amply attest. In them, extreme ambition vies with no less extreme idealism to produce an almost ecstatic vision of the place of art, and the artist, in society:

> If music were not abandoned to public charity, we should have in Europe a theater, an operatic Pantheon, exclusively devoted to the performance of monumental masterpieces, in which they would be produced at long in-

* Sir Colin Davis recorded all of Berlioz's major works for Philips in the 60's and 70's, and these performances, now available on CD, are consistently high in technical quality and musical understanding. Also of interest are Sir Thomas Beecham's vivacious 1959 recording with the Orchestre National de l'ORTF of the *Symphonie fantastique* (EMI CDM 7 64032 2); Arturo Toscanini's 1947 broadcast performance with the NBC Symphony of *Roméo et Juliette* (RCA Victor Gold Seal 60274-2-RG, two CD's); Serge Koussevitzky's 1944 recording with violist William Primrose and the Boston Symphony of *Harold in Italy* (Biddulph WHL 028); and a collection of overtures and excerpts from longer works recorded between 1927 and 1934 by Sir Hamilton Harty, the first modern conductor regularly to perform Berlioz's music (Pearl GEMM CD 9485).

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tervals, with a care and a magnificence worthy of them, by ARTISTS, and heard, as part of solemn musical festivals, by audiences of feeling and intelligence.

That a man of such hyper-refined sensibilities should have been forced to cover third-rate opera performances for a living is among the great ironies of musical history. It was emphatically an irony not lost on Berlioz himself, whose letters are full of complaints about his fate:

> This evening I've got a dreadful article to write on a large operetta by Auber; it's music for milliners sung by smart young ladies-about-town and commercial travelers; I'll say it's *quite nice*, without adding "for saleslgirls." What drudgery!!

As these and other letters make abundantly clear, however, Berlioz's Romantic idealism was tempered by self-deprecating wit and an engagingly wry sense of the absurd. Though he took himself no less seriously than did Wagner or Liszt, there was nothing *earnest* about his seriousness, which is to say nothing Germanic. For all his admiration of Beethoven and Goethe, he was French to the core—as French as Lord Byron, in many ways his soulmate as a Romantic figure, was English.

One sees evidence of this difference in Berlioz's music, in which the most exaggerated forms of Romantic subjectivism are held in check by a near-classic sense of restraint far removed from the mainstream of 19th-century Germanic musical tradition. Among the most revealing examples is the love scene from *Roméo et Juliette*, in which intense passion is portrayed in a tightly controlled, almost chaste, manner. The passion comes through clearly—Toscanini once described this movement as "the most beautiful music in the world"—but is never allowed to lapse into humid excess.

David Cairns, Berlioz's greatest biographer, has aptly described the unusual sensibility on display in the love scene as "a core of reserve at the heart of [the] most fiery intensities. You cannot wallow in it. It can be intoxicating, but to the spirit more than to the senses." Unfortunately, this reserve went largely unnoticed by Berlioz's contemporaries. Rather, he was seen through the philistine eyes of the Parisian press, which regularly caricatured him as a cynical purveyor of musical explosions. ("My friend," says a character in a cartoon of the period, "I see that you are addressing me, but I have just come from a Berlioz concert and I cannot understand a word you are saying.") For this reason, and despite the steadfast advocacy of Liszt, Schumann, and Wagner, French concertgoers refused to give his music a proper hearing.

THE STORY of Berlioz's middle age is a tale of protracted disillusion. Though acclaimed as a conductor throughout Europe, he was unwilling to settle in any city but Paris, the one place that would have nothing to do with him; his occasional concerts there, always given at his own expense, failed to turn a profit large enough to allow him to give up criticism. The Paris Opera showed no interest in his music, and the Paris Conservatory declined to appoint him as a teacher. "In Paris," he wrote, "music is a god—so long as only the skinniest sacrifices are required to feed its altars." To boot, his marriage to Harriet Smithson proved disastrous.

Berlioz's last major undertaking as a composer was *Les Troyens*, on which he began work in 1856. Within two years, the four-hour-long opera was substantially complete, but another five years went by before he was able to persuade a company, the Théâtre-Lyrique, to mount a production of the last three acts (the first two remained unperformed until 1890). Though *Les Troyens à Carthage*, as the second part of *Les Troyens* was known, proved successful—Berlioz made enough money from it to retire at last from music criticism—he was enraged at the cuts made by the producer and subsequently refused permission during his lifetime for any other productions.

In retirement, depression and ill health made it impossible for him to compose:

> I am living in absolute emotional isolation. I do nothing but suffer for eight or nine hours a day, without hope of any sort, with no ambitions beyond sleep, and appreciating the truth of the Chinese proverb: "Better sitting than standing, better lying than sitting, better asleep than awake, and better dead than asleep."

He spent his last years finishing his memoirs, conducting in Vienna, Cologne, and St. Petersburg, writing increasingly unhappy letters to his friends, and mourning the death of his only son. Berlioz died in 1869, mostly forgotten by the residents of the city he loved—and hated—more than any other.

THROUGHOUT HIS life, Berlioz blamed his lack of success on the ignorance and poor taste of the concertgoing public:

> It is only natural that many should regard me as a lunatic; I regard them as children or half-wits. To such people all music that deviates from the narrow path where the makers of *opéras-comiques* toil and spin, inevitably seems and has seemed for a quarter of a century the music of a lunatic.

But his failure to engage the great mass of concertgoers was—and is—not entirely their fault. Many, perhaps most, listeners are made justifiably uncomfortable by what the critic Sir Neville Cardus called the "dry-eyed pathos" of Berlioz's music, in which wild, even neurotic, emotions are kept under the closest possible rein. Small wonder that Verdi, the least neurotic of composers, found him lack-

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ing in "balance." In fact, balance is the defining characteristic of Berlioz's music, but it is an uneasy balance of violent forces locked in perpetual opposition. For Berlioz, the "core of reserve" was not a mode of artistic expression so much as a means of self-protection, a way of drawing back from the abyss of derangement:

> The other day I was singing some of the numbers [from Gluck's opera *Iphigénie en Tauride*] and got quite carried away. I began to tremble so violently, weeping and dribbling from the mouth, and my heart began to beat so fearfully that I went up to my room so as not to be discovered in such a state, and as soon as I got through the door I felt so ill I had to sit down.

It was not until the 20th century that critics, scholars, and performers (most of them, significantly, English and American) discovered the real Berlioz. To this day, however, his high-strung style has continued to prove elusive to lovers of Romantic music who are accustomed to the comparative straightforwardness of Wagner or Schumann. The peculiarities of his temperament make it likely that he will always remain an artist for the few rather than the many, like Henry James in literature or Edouard Vuillard in painting. But for those who respond to his uniquely individual voice, no music is more expressive or moving. To read Hugh Macdonald's finely edited volume of Berlioz's letters is to be brought appreciably closer to the endlessly interesting mind of the man who made it.

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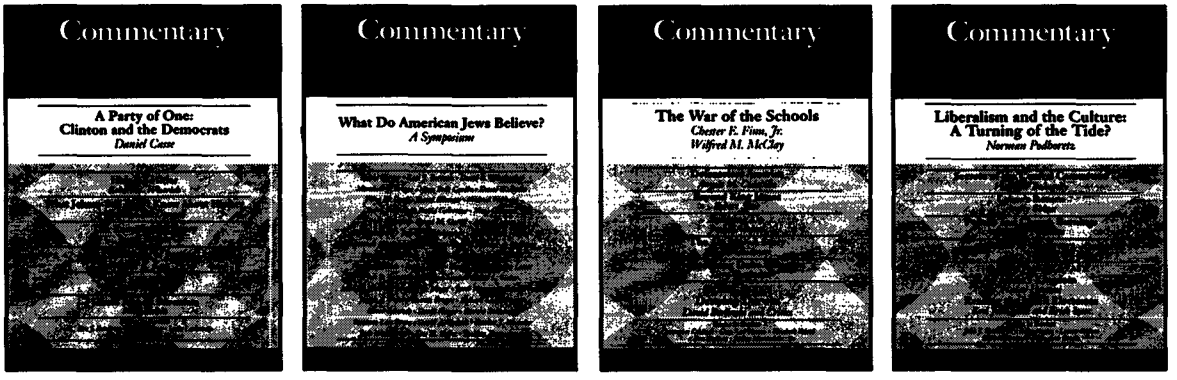

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Books in Review

No Exit?

The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews From the Nazis

by William D. Rubinstein

Routledge. 267 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Walter Laqueur

UNTIL ABOUT ten years ago, William Rubinstein, an American-born and -educated historian who now teaches at the University of Aberystwyth-Wales, believed that the Western democracies fighting Hitler "did nothing" to save European Jewry from the Nazis and "were highly culpable for this failure." He subsequently changed his mind. Rubinstein now attempts to show that no matter what the democracies did or might have done, it would have made little difference to the plight of Europe's Jews.

Rubinstein's rethinking began, he tells us, following a conversation with a local Jewish politician in Australia, where he himself lived for many years. What other intellectual processes led him to reconsider his earlier views he never makes clear. To judge by the notes to this book, he has not labored in archives to discover new facts that might buttress any such reassessment; he seems to be familiar with the secondary literature, but only to the extent that it is in English—and much of it is not. Rubinstein simply appears to be a man of absolutes: either the Western democracies did nothing at all to help the Jews—his former position—or, as he maintains today, they behaved in an exemplary way; either a great many Jews could have been saved, or none.

Whatever accounts for Rubinstein's change of mind, his new views have already won him a number of advocates, not only in Britain—where there is little sympathy these days for Jews who, as it is said, are forever complaining that not enough was done for them during World War II—but also in the United States, where the book has been praised by notable authorities like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. as a "commanding work of historical criticism." It is, however, anything but.

RUBINSTEIN ADVANCES a number of theses in *The Myth of Rescue*, devoting a chapter to each. He argues, among other things, that an overwhelming majority, if not all, of the Jews trying to escape from areas under the control of Nazi Germany up to the outbreak of World War II could have done so—in other words, that the doors of the democracies were not closed; that once the war got under way, no plan to rescue European Jewry in any numbers could have succeeded; and that contrary to the findings of a number of historians, the Allies could not have bombed Auschwitz, thus sparing a great many Jews from the gas chambers. For reasons that I hope will become clear as we proceed, I shall deal with these arguments in reverse chronological order.

WALTER LAQUEUR, *the distinguished historian, is the editor of the forthcoming* Yale Encyclopedia of the Holocaust. *His* The Terrible Secret *(1980), a study of how the first news of the "Final Solution" reached the public, will be reissued next year.*

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On the last point, Rubinstein repeats an old canard—namely, that the existence of Auschwitz was unknown in the West until the summer of 1944; this contention has been authoritatively refuted at least 100 times by now. But in any case, he insists, nothing of a military nature could have been done against the camp because technical means for such a mission were not available. This point may be correct as far as it goes—Rubinstein cites a number of military historians to support it—but that is not very far at all. The truth remains that the Allies gave no priority to developing the capacity to put Auschwitz out of action, so it is hardly surprising that no such mission could have been carried out.

To be sure, a strike against Auschwitz or any of the other concentration camps would necessarily have come too late to save many; by the end of 1942, the great majority of Polish and Ukrainian Jews and a large number in Belorussia had already been sent to their deaths. But some of the ghettos in which Jews were then imprisoned—Lodz, for example—were still intact, and the Jews of Hungary, Italy, and Greece had not yet been deported to Auschwitz. If only a tiny fraction of the vast sums and resources devoted to the war effort had been diverted to the task of destroying the rail lines leading to the death camps or hitting the extermination facilities themselves, untold numbers might have been saved.

As for the possibility of rescuing some of Europe's Jews by various nonmilitary means—greater publicity as to the facts of the mass murder, continual pressure on the Axis satellites who were eagerly collaborating with the Nazis, bribing officials in occupied Europe to act in behalf of their Jewish populations—Rubinstein is convinced that such measures were doomed to fail and therefore should not have been tried. He seems to believe that up to the very end, Nazi Europe was a rigidly controlled zone run by an omnipotent Gestapo. But this was simply not the case, especially after the tide of the war had turned. In a fascinating memoir published recently in Germany, Gad Beck, a Jewish survivor, describes how, as late as 1943-44, Jews were being smuggled out of Berlin to neutral countries for cash—the going rate was 5,000 to 6,000 marks. Those who lacked such sums perished.

If this kind of activity occurred in the very heart of the Third Reich, how much greater were the chances to spirit Jews successfully out of outlying territories where the Nazi grip was far less secure. If the various Jewish emissaries operating in such places as Constantinople and Switzerland had had more money at their disposal, or if American Jewish organizations had come up with sizable sums in 1943 rather than two or three years later, there cannot be the slightest doubt, though Rubinstein adamantly disputes it, that a great many Jewish lives might have been saved.

BUT IT is in dealing with Allied refugee policies in the prewar years that Rubinstein's analysis descends from being plainly wrong to positively absurd. Thus, he characterizes the immigration policies of the Western democracies in the 1930's as liberal, even generous. There was no real problem, he asserts; everyone who wanted to find a haven could. As for the many historians who disagree with him on this point, they, he suggests, are guilty of falsification.

Rubinstein's main ace, triumphantly produced time and again in the book, on its dust jacket, and in his publisher's promotional material, is the "fact" that fully 72 percent of German Jews succeeded in escaping from Nazi Germany before the war broke out. He also lists the prominent figures who made their way to safety in the United States, including the novelist Thomas Mann and the historian Hans Kohn. So lax and magnanimous was American refugee policy, he contends, that even "radicals" and "troublemakers" like Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno were let in.

But Rubinstein's 72 percent is far from the truth; the real figure can be found most recently in Saul Friedländer's *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, which examines the issue comprehensively. Rubinstein includes in his calculation thousands who did not in fact escape but were deported by the Germans to a no-man's-land in the East. He also includes tens of thousands who did manage to flee but ended up in extermination camps because they were trapped in countries subsequently occupied by the Nazis, having been barred from entering sanctuaries like the United States. As for Thomas Mann, he was not Jewish (as Rubinstein acknowledges) and his Nobel-laureate status made him a rather exceptional case, to say the least. Hans Kohn, on the other hand, *was* Jewish; but he hailed not from Germany but from Czechoslovakia, which he left not in the 1930's but in the 1920's. Neither Arendt nor Adorno was known to American authorities as a radical or troublemaker in the late 1930's; in fact, it is most unlikely that more than a half-dozen Americans would have known of either one's existence at that time.

One longstanding bone of historical contention has to do with Great Britain's restrictions on entry to Palestine, another crucial refuge for Jews. Rubinstein acknowledges that this particular door was largely closed, but he claims that this never greatly affected how many Jews left Germany. Even the British White Paper of 1939, which virtually ended Jewish immigration into Palestine, was not of salient significance, he maintains. A more controlling fact was that there were few Zionists in Germany in the interwar years, and that the pull of Zionism barely increased even after Hitler

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came to power. The point, Rubinstein concludes, is that not many Jews were interested in departing to that dangerous part of the world.

This entire line of argument is nothing but a red herring. In those years, people were simply desperate to get out. Non-Zionists went to Palestine just as Zionists emigrated to faraway places like Shanghai, the Dominican Republic, or wherever else they could find sanctuary.

In *The Myth of Rescue*, Rubinstein is treating a period that, for better or worse, some of us know not merely through the secondary sources cited in his book but through bitter experience. Virtually every German Jew of my generation left behind family and friends who subsequently perished because a visa or a stamp was missing from their passport. Rubinstein, born after the war, is lucky never to have been among those trying to cross borders illegally only to be turned back by the police, a phenomenon which he mistakenly believes never occurred anywhere except on the Swiss frontier. (He finds extenuating reasons for Switzerland's conduct, too.) Nor did he have to stand in the unending queues in front of the American and other consulates in Berlin waiting to be told that his turn would come next year, if ever. The plain fact is that hundreds of thousands of European Jews would have emigrated in 1938-39 at the very latest if the gates had been open a little wider, and if the restrictive immigration provisions of the democracies had been less severe.

WILLIAM RUBINSTEIN's willful ignorance and his lack of judgment in connection with the most painful period in modern Jewish history would be bad enough if his were an isolated case. Unfortunately, it is not. His book takes its place in a new genre that has sprouted during the last decade, propagating a variety of often contradictory views about World War II but sharing a common denominator: arguments that are flatly and often outrageously wrong.

Thus, we have historians who maintain that Hitler was a weak dictator led astray by bureaucrats; others who argue that he was blinded by his anti-Communism; and still others who assert that modernity itself was the root cause of the European disaster. We have had works accusing the Zionist leadership in Palestine of committing treason against the Jewish people, and others arguing that only ultra-Orthodox Jews engaged in serious attempts at rescue. Rubinstein's publisher declares in its promotional material that *The Myth of Rescue* will appeal to readers of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*.* Though neither author should be pleased by this statement, it is true that Goldhagen's best-seller is, in its own way, part and parcel of the new trend of staking out unsustainable claims in a preposterous way.

What is behind this strange phenomenon? Certainly there is room for legitimate disagreement on many questions connected with World War II; but much of what is now being written goes well beyond the perimeters of elementary common sense. Could we have here a simple instance of the desire to be original at almost any cost? In some cases, indeed, this may be the motive force, but in others the authors seem to be deeply convinced of the new truths they have discovered. Is the problem, again, simply one of shoddy research? Here, too, the explanation holds in some cases but not in others. And then there are

* For a discussion of this book, see Robert S. Wistrich's "Helping Hitler" in the July 1996 COMMENTARY.

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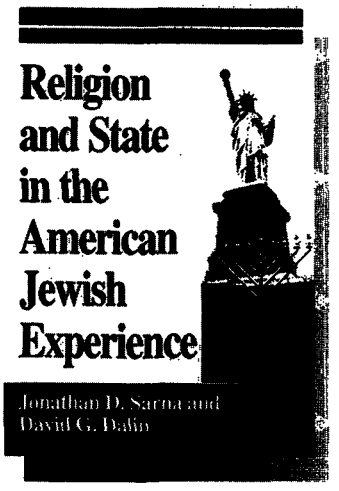

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those who approach their task with preconceived notions and proceed like lawyers looking for any ammunition at hand to prove their brief.

There appear, in fact, to be almost unlimited reasons why people get things wrong. But why the Holocaust in particular, a subject which should be approached in a spirit of utmost caution, should attract so much charlatanism, I cannot explain. It is a matter of great and growing concern.

These Truths

American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence

by Pauline Maier

Knopf. 304 pp. $27.50

Reviewed by
Gary Rosen

ON A hot July afternoon several years ago, Pauline Maier, a professor of history at MIT, took a break from an academic conference in Washington and set out for the National Archives, curious to see the aging sheets of parchment with which Americans declared independence in 1776 and, more than a decade later, established a national government. What she found there deeply distressed her. The "Charters of Freedom," as the famed documents are labeled, occupy a massive, self-proclaimed "Shrine" of bulletproof glass and bronze. The structure, Maier observes in her new book,

> resembles the awesome, gilded, pre-Vatican II altars of my Catholic girlhood, raised three steps above where the worshippers assembled. The Declaration is its centerpiece, held above the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in what looks like a tabernacle, or perhaps a monstrance, the device used to display the host on special days of adoration.

Such reverence, she believes, has no place in our attitudes toward the American past, least of all toward the Declaration of Independence, whose red-white-and-blue bunting she aims to strip away in *American Scripture*. Where the naive Fourth-of-July celebrant sees towering heroes, deeds without precedent, and a "sacred text" containing philosophical insights of astonishing originality, Maier finds the intransigent complexity and continuity of history. The standard account of the Declaration's making, she argues, consists overwhelmingly of myths conceived long after the events of 1776.

For Maier, putting 1776 in its proper context means, above all, cutting Thomas Jefferson down to size. The Declaration of Independence, she reminds us, did not spring fully formed from the Virginian's head in a few hours of inspired composition. In form and tone, its pedigree was English, pointing unmistakably to the Declaration of Rights of 1689, by which Parliament asserted its claims against the crown in the Glorious Revolution. As for content, Jefferson adapted freely from two newly drafted Virginia documents, his own preamble for the state constitution and George Mason's influential Declaration of Rights.

Jefferson not only had models to imitate, says Maier, but capable editors to see that he imitated them well. The members of the Continental Congress rolled up their sleeves on July 2 and for three days pored over the draft Declaration, sharpening the prose, adding the occasional phrase, and, most of all, eliminating "Jefferson's more outlandish assertions and unnecessary words." They decided, for instance, that the British monarch's "injuries and usurpations" were not so much "unremitting" as "repeated," and that breaking from the mother country demanded an appeal "to the supreme judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions." The long passages that they sensibly deleted, amounting to a full quarter of Jefferson's original text, asserted, among other things, that the colonists had settled America "unassisted by the wealth or the strength of Great Britain," and that George III, of all people, bore primary responsibility for the continuation of the slave trade.

In publicly committing themselves to independence, Maier shows, Jefferson and his colleagues were not alone among their countrymen, or even first. In the spring and early summer of 1776, scores of colonial legislatures, localities, and other groups—again, looking to English precedents—solemnly proclaimed their grievances against the metropole and endorsed a separation. These texts, several of which Maier reproduces in an appendix, show the homelier, more concrete terms in which "ordinary and frequently uneducated people"—Massachusetts townsfolk, Virginia freeholders, New York mechanics, Pennsylvania militiamen—justified their momentous decision. Though crucial at the time in giving the Continental Congress much-needed political cover, most of these grass-roots manifestos, she laments, "have been forgotten under the influence of our national obsession with 'the' Declaration of Independence."

"The" Declaration's lasting appeal, Maier recognizes, rests overwhelmingly on the grand philosophical language of its second paragraph. Indeed, to the extent that Americans still know the Declaration, it is because they recall its ringing invocation of the "self-evident" truths that "all men are created equal" and "are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." Here Maier is quick to credit Jefferson's eloquence. But she

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no less quickly qualifies his achievement. The ideas themselves were "absolutely conventional among Americans of his time," a distillation of Locke, Milton, Algernon Sidney, and other writers in the Whig pantheon. Moreover, in 1776 no one paid much attention to the Declaration's speculative preliminaries. The real interest lay in their practical upshot: "the right of revolution" that Americans were then so busily exercising.

In fact, according to Maier, the Declaration slipped into obscurity soon after it had served that practical purpose. Only in the 1790's, with Jefferson's founding of the Republican party to combat what he saw as an incipient Federalist aristocracy, did the Declaration begin to assume its familiar role as an egalitarian creed. For the first time, recitation of the "deathless instrument" of the "immortal Jefferson," as one Republican partisan christened it, became a regular feature of Independence Day festivities.

Several generations later, Abraham Lincoln would complete the process, offering up "[a]ll honor to Jefferson" and proclaiming the proposition that "all men are created equal" nothing less than "a standard maxim" for all humankind. Thus it was that the Declaration, having started out as a brief for revolution against an established regime, became transformed into "a moral standard by which the day-to-day policies and practices of the nation could be judged." In a supreme irony, a philosophical digression had become the document's essence.

The point of this involved tale, as Maier would have it, is to explode the idea that the Declaration was some sort of epiphany, a world-historical moment presided over by a demigod. As she writes on the final page of the book, turning again to the shrine at the National Archives:

> Why should the American people file by, looking up reverentially at a document that was and is their creation, as if it were handed down by God or were the work of superhuman men whose talents far exceeded those of any who followed them?

The problem is that, despite Maier's own certainty in rejecting such misplaced awe, *American Scripture* actually provides ample evidence for the traditional view of the Declaration.

Take the central issue: Jefferson's role in writing the Declaration. Was he the author or, as she calls him, merely a "draftsman"? Looking at the annotated Declaration that Maier usefully includes at the back of the book, one cannot help being struck by the Continental Congress's restrained use of the red quill. Granted, the final version is shorter than Jefferson's original and contains a few words that were not of his choosing; such are the ways of editors. The Declaration still shines through as Jefferson's rhetorical masterpiece.

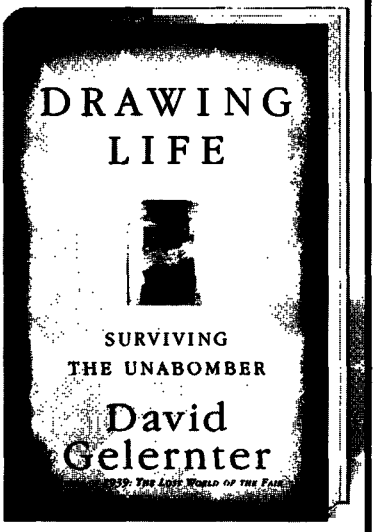
Though Maier claims that she "bear[s] no animus" toward Jefferson, she says it like someone forced to kill in the service of a just cause. In this case, the cause would seem to be a notion of history that has no room for men of genius. The making of the Declaration, Maier insists, has been "a collective act," an ongoing national spectacle with a "cast" of millions. In some sense, no doubt, this is true. But the cast has had its stars—and they deserve top billing.*

Giving Jefferson his due as a wordsmith does not make him the originator of the ideas that he articulated so powerfully. To a large extent, these were indeed, as Maier argues, philosophical commonplaces of the day. Jefferson himself

* For an outstanding recent account of a great statesman's role in creating another of our "Charters of Freedom," see Robert A. Goldwin, *From Parchment to Power: How James Madison Used the Bill of Rights to Save the Constitution*. AEI Press, 213 pp., $24.95.

Although I was hurt permanently and will never get back a normal right hand or right eye, although my chest will always look like a gouged-out construction site—here is the main thing: I recovered. In some ways I am better than before. The nation can recover too.

David Gelernter, from *Drawing Life*



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never suggested otherwise, however. As he wrote in a celebrated letter that she quotes, the Declaration was meant to be "an expression of the American mind."

Unfortunately, Maier is determined to challenge American exceptionalism no less than Jefferson's, and thus fails to see just how singular a national mind it was. Americans in 1776 were not engaged in a transatlantic reprise of the Glorious Revolution. Yes, the English had their Declaration too. But, as Maier concedes, it was the work of a Parliament dominated by the gentry; its aim was to limit a still-powerful monarchy; and its justification extended no further than reestablishing the recognized laws and liberties of Englishmen.

WHAT SET the American Declaration apart was the idea of human equality—of natural rights—which Maier labors to relegate to an afterthought. Unlike their British counterparts of a century before, the American revolutionaries were unambiguously committed to popular consent as the essential test of political legitimacy. How else to explain the democratic ferment for independence that Maier herself so ably describes? How else to explain the irresistible expectation on the part of Americans that their new governments would be republican? Maier's repeated assertions to the contrary cannot change the fact that in his preamble, Jefferson gave breath and blood to an abstraction that Americans themselves saw as the basis of both the "right of revolution" and, looking ahead to the fruits of independence, just government.

Jefferson's energetic editors could easily have cast off the preamble as just so much excess verbiage. What natural equality required in practice was, after all, a matter of great controversy, not least for those who somehow thought it compatible with the institution of slavery. It remains a matter of great controversy today. But the members of the Continental Congress, like the people they represented, understood that their parochial struggle gained meaning and dignity from its attachment to a wider human cause. More than two centuries later, it is hard to disagree with them, or to suppress a proper sense of veneration before the American scripture that embodies this profound wisdom.

Storytellers

Beyond All Reason:
The Radical Assault on
Truth in American Law
by Daniel A. Farber
and Suzanna Sherry
Oxford. 195 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Heather Mac Donald

DIPPING INTO a law review these days is an eye-opening experience. Next to a shrinking number of articles on such matters as regulating the Internet and expanding Fourth Amendment protections, one is likely to find all manner of strange stuff: a feminist law professor recounting in grisly detail her own reproductive experiences, another scholar telling about being treated impolitely at Benetton's, and yet another advising racial minorities "to flee Enlightenment-based democracies like mad."

What is going on here? For the past decade, our law schools have been the scene of a full-scale attack on Anglo-American law by a new generation of minority and female professors. These proponents of "critical-race studies" and feminist jurisprudence charge the legal tradition with endemic racism and sexism. As Daniel A. Farber and Suzanna Sherry, professors of law at the University Minnesota, show in their new book, this movement is not just another expression of grievance politics. Rather, it is a campaign against the very ideas that make possible the rule of law. However grotesquely, the movement has achieved a position of influence and even dominance within any number of the country's most prestigious universities.

THE PRIME target of the critics, as Farber and Sherry document, is the notion that law's defining virtue is rational argument and decision-making. For the race-and-gender theorists, rationality is a mere tool of white, male oppression, designed to silence and subordinate minorities and women. Rationality, on this view, provides the patina of legitimacy that "patriarchy" needs in order to maintain its rule.

The most heinous pretense of such rational neutrality, the new critics believe, can be found in our society's vaunted standards of merit. In their eyes, merit as such does not exist; it is everywhere and always an artificial construct, devised by the powerful to preserve their status. Farber and Sherry quote Richard Delgado of the University of Colorado, for whom standards of merit are merely the way white people keep "their own deficiencies neatly hidden while assuring only people like them get in."

To combat the domination of white, male reason, the critical race-and-gender theorists call on their colleagues to reject traditional case analysis and instead start telling "stories." These are autobiographical and/or fictional accounts of encounters with discrimination, purporting to unmask the insidious aims lurking beneath the rational surface of the law. As a mode of discourse, storytelling is also frankly designed, as one advocate puts it, to advance the interests of "the outsider community," and hence it is

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not open to criticism by members of the privileged class.

As Farber and Sherry note, among the more alarming qualities of storytelling is its breezy indifference to questions of fact. Patricia Williams of Columbia University, for example, has written that it does not matter whether, in a notorious incident from the late 1980's, Tawana Brawley was actually raped by six white men outside Poughkeepsie, New York, or, as it subsequently emerged, she just made up the incident: either way, according to this professor of law, Brawley remains the "victim of some unspeakable crime."

In addition to the assault this sort of thinking represents on the very basis of law, Farber and Sherry are alarmed by the anti-Semitic and anti-Asian implications of the attack on merit. As they observe, Jews and Asians are present in disproportionate numbers in universities and at the highest reaches of the economy, a fact for which critics who reject the notion of individual merit have no benign explanation. Storytelling hardly helps matters, with its insular, paranoid mode of thought and its resistance to rational criticism. Taken to its logical conclusion, the work of the critics leads to suggestions of conspiracy, an especially dangerous tendency, write Farber and Sherry, "given the prevalence of anti-Semitism in some minority communities."

And yet, powerful as is their case against the movement and its epigones, Farber and Sherry cannot, in the end, bring themselves to denounce it root and branch. To the contrary, even as they lay bare the outrages committed by race-and-gender studies, they offer inexplicable praise for its practitioners. Patricia Williams, perhaps the movement's most incompetent writer and thinker, is characterized by them as "one of the most engaging and consistently interesting of the legal storytellers." A gay legal scholar's tales of "flamboyant sexuality" in the military are said to illustrate "the transformative power of narratives." And they extol feminists and critical-race scholars for making "rich and interesting" contributions to the debate over affirmative action.

These judgments—impossible to square with the evidence presented by the authors themselves—inadvertently help to reveal just how it is that critical race-and-gender studies have gained their scandalous position of prominence in our universities. With their accommodationist reflexes honed by years of conditioning, Farber and Sherry have rendered themselves incapable of following the logic of their own analysis. Thus, even as they rightly contend that charges of widespread societal discrimination ring "increasingly hollow," they feel compelled to declare that blacks need to "continue battling" widespread societal discrimination. While worrying over the attack on meritocracy, they dutifully register their objections to a "blind adherence to . . . merit."

No less schizophrenic is their portrait of the contemporary university. Even as they document the myriad ways in which reason has been banished from the academy, they go on lauding universities as "enclaves of reason" committed to the "pursuit of truth." Faithful liberals to the last, Farber and Sherry have yet to learn what defenders of the university's traditional mission might have told them a generation ago: that in education, as in law, there is no midpoint between the claims of dispassionate reason and the demand for social upheaval.

In clear, moving prose, *Esau's Tears* explores the remarkable and revealing variety of modern anti-Semitism, from its emergence in the 1870s in a racial-political form to the eve of the Nazi takeover, in the major countries of Europe and in the United States. In contrast to previous studies, Lindemann suggests that anti-Semitism in these years was more ambiguous, less pervasive and central to the lives of both Jews and non-Jews. He also maintains that it did not clearly point to a rising hatred of Jews everywhere, and even less to the likelihood of mass murder.

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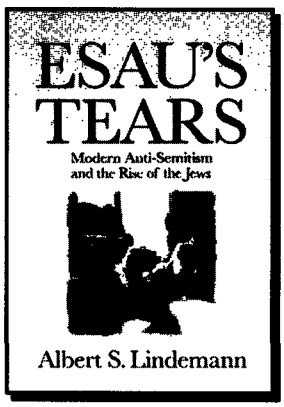

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Every Creeping Thing

Nature Writings
by John Muir
edited by William Cronon
Library of America. 888 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Algis Valiunas

MORE ELOQUENTLY than any other American writer, John Muir, a man of the wilds, explored the significance that the wilds hold for civilization. Just what that significance is continues to be a matter of contention. On the one hand, the conquest of nature remains the great modern project, and virtually everyone wants what it offers: material comfort, freedom from disease or debility, a longer life. In this sense, nature—or the environment, to give it its contemporary name—tends to get in the way of the civilized pursuit of happiness. Yet on the other hand, for people who can afford such a luxury, the worship of nature becomes in itself a mark of the civilized temperament, with results both benign and destructive of human happiness.

Certainly Muir and the environmentalist movement, which reveres him as its founding father, have never been more in fashion than they are at present. In California, Washington, Alaska, and Scotland, glaciers, gorges, trails, mountains, woods, and parks bear Muir's name. Quotations from his writings have recently graced President Clinton's address to the United Nations Earth Summit—as well as a television commercial selling Chevy Tahoes. And now the Library of America has certified his place in the national literary canon by publishing a generous selection of his works, laudably edited by William Cronon, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin.

MUIR WAS born in 1838 in Dunbar, Scotland, on the North Sea. In *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (1913), included in full in the present volume, he would later recall a childhood both idyllic and miserable. The idyllic part was devoted to fistfighting, wandering, and climbing the walls of Dunbar Castle; the misery he owed mostly to the dour piety of his father, who made him learn the Bible "by heart and by sore flesh" and warned him repeatedly of the hellfire that awaited wicked boys.

When Muir was ten, he and his family came to America, settling as farmers in Wisconsin. The boy got to know American nature the hard way, working seventeen hours a day at "chopping, grubbing, stump-digging, rail-splitting, fence-building, barn-building, house-building, and so forth." Despite the harshness of this life, nature exercised its charms: Muir gained "a real knowledge of animals as fellow-mortals, learning to respect and love them, and even to win some of their love."

At the University of Wisconsin, Muir received an introduction to botany and became a scientific aficionado of flowers, "all alike revealing glorious traces of the thoughts of God." A pacifist, he dodged the draft in 1864, fleeing to Canada and returning when the Civil War was over. In 1867, he walked 1,000 miles from Indiana to Florida's Gulf Coast, and then, after a couple of detours, shipped out for California. He found his way to the Sierra Nevada and Yosemite Valley, which became his haunts for the rest of his life. In 1871, he met Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had come to see Yosemite, and published his first essay.

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After marrying, Muir took over his father-in-law's California fruit farm, which he made thrive as never before. He became involved as a writer and an activist in the successful effort to establish Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks in 1890, and subsequently helped to found the Sierra Club, serving as its president until his death. And always he traveled widely—through the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa—and wrote prolifically. When he died in 1914, Muir was the most celebrated celebrator of nature in America.

BUT WHAT exactly did he celebrate? Muir's vocation was the love of *wildness*. Wherever wildness was to be found, he saw God's handiwork, and his own response to that handiwork ran from enthusiasm to euphoria to unrelenting ecstasy. Hiking an inhospitable gorge in winter, and happening upon a few doughty plants, he was moved first and foremost to thoughts of the divine: "How wholly infused with God is this one big word of love that we call the world!"

Although Muir seems never to have doubted God's love for His creatures, he also understood that this love was not always gentle or readily understandable. In this he differed from the well-known strain of lofty sentimentality in American thinking about nature. That strain is famously exemplified by Emerson's belief that, if men were only to live in accordance with Spirit, nature would make itself perfectly congenial: "So fast will disagreeable appearances, swine, spiders, snakes, pests, madhouses, prisons, enemies, vanish."

Muir, a genuinely religious man, was not so sanguine. Of certain tiny black ants common in the mountains, he wrote:

> Their bodies are mostly jaws curved like ice-hooks, and to get work for these weapons seems to be their chief aim and pleasure.... As soon as a vulnerable spot is discovered on man or beast, they stand on their heads and sink their jaws, and though torn limb from limb, they will yet hold on and die biting deeper. When I contemplate this fierce creature so widely distributed and strongly entrenched, I see that much remains to be done ere the world is brought under the rule of universal peace and love.

For Muir, then, nature taught the hard lesson that continual creation is impossible without endless destruction. Pain and terror and devastation frequented the most beautiful places; and this fact, far from being abhorred, should be reveled in. Of spring floods, he noted with sublime heartlessness how unfortunate it was that most people knew them only by the damage they caused in the lowlands, where they carried away bridges and houses; if more folks could "enjoy storms so noble . . . in their homes in the mountains," floods would rise greatly in human esteem.

The adjective "noble" is characteristic of Muir; it must appear at least 200 times in this 800-page volume, in conjunction with storms, mountains, trees, animals, waters. But unlike other 18th- and 19th-century writers preoccupied with the question of nobility, Muir never uses the word to describe men. At best, most human beings struck him as fools plain and simple, unable to see beyond their own immediate interests, while the worst of them were "plunderers, . . . as unconscionable and enterprising as Satan."

The obverse of Muir's love of wildness was a profound misanthropy. "The world, we are told, was made especially for man," he wrote, adding that this was "a presumption not supported by all the facts." If the book of Genesis gave man dominion "over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth," to Muir's mind it was high time that every creeping thing rise up and claim its

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due. "The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge." For all we know, even rocks might have feelings, which we in our "blind and exclusive perfection" could not detect.

IT WAS precisely over this question of man's dominion that a schism developed in the conservationist movement during its early years. On one side were Muir and the preservationists, who wanted wilderness areas left intact. On the other side were Gifford Pinchot (the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service) and the utilitarians, who advocated "wise use" of forest reserves and who insisted that "wilderness is waste." And along these lines the debate continues to this day—over preservation of the habitats of endangered species, over grazing rights on public lands, over the sensitivity of wilderness ecosystems to human intrusion.

Muir's wisdom on these matters was strictly limited. Although he enjoys a reputation as a woodland sage, he was more precisely a holy fool, and sometimes not much different from a damn fool. He subscribed to the most radical egalitarianism imaginable, according to which every living creature was the equal of every other—except, of course, for man, who was almost always inferior to any wild thing you could name.

Still, if one should not go to Muir for policy, one can safely go to him for poetry. In this volume he is at his best not when he is making divagations into the polemical, the philosophical, or the scientific, but when he is looking intently at something, walking around it, sniffing the air, looking again. As a writer he is a kind of visionary sensualist, a seer who reveals what lies in plain sight, and who can make his reader know the living significance of even so apparently inconsequential a creature as a Douglas squirrel:

> He threads the tasseled branches of the pines, stirring their needles like a rustling breeze; now shooting across openings in arrowy lines; now launching in curves, glinting deftly from side to side in sudden zigzags, and swirling in giddy loops and spirals around the knotty trunks; getting into what seem to be the most impossible situations without sense of danger; now on his haunches, now on his head; yet ever graceful, and punctuating his most irrepressible outbursts of energy with little dots and dashes of perfect repose.

SMALLER MEN than Muir—some prosaic and sensible, others, like those who built Hoover Dam, possessed of a visionary flair of their own—have overseen the use of our wild lands, and by and large they have done so more judiciously than he (or his successors) would have done. But without him we might never have been reminded of what we lose when we sacrifice wildness, as we inevitably do, to the needs of civilization. Muir was a devotee of what he saw as one of nature's creative principles: "the most intense individuality." This devotion made him sometimes priggish, even insufferable. Yet so long as our democracy hopes to promote true human variety (which is a far cry from so-called diversity), the high distinction of a man like Muir deserves to be cherished. In his self-styled American way, he was a godly man, and even a noble one.

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Between Left and Right

Liberal Racism
by Jim Sleeper
Viking. 195 pp. $21.95

Reviewed by
Christopher Caldwell

RARE AMONG liberals, Jim Sleeper declines to credit the good faith of everyone who claims to work on behalf of American blacks. In his first book, *The Closest of Strangers* (1990), the former New York *Daily News* columnist delved into a number of then-recent racial flare-ups in New York—the Tawana Brawley case, the black boycott of Korean-owned convenience stores, the controversy around the "wilding" attack by blacks on a white jogger in Central Park—and showed how self-appointed "healers" had manipulated racial feelings in the city in order to aggrandize themselves. In *Liberal Racism*, Sleeper again focuses on New York but also casts a wider net, scrutinizing not only activists but the elite academics and journalists who have shaped the politics of race in the country at large. He also states emphatically the controversial notion his earlier book only suggested: that "liberalism no longer curbs discrimination; it invites it. It does not expose racism; it recapitulates and, sometimes, reinvents it."

For Sleeper, much contemporary liberal thought betrays an unhealthy fascination with the idea that "racial differences are so profound that they are almost primordial." His opening chapters take aim at a number of examples. Thus, he dismisses the political scientist Andrew Hacker, who in *Two Nations* (1992) portrayed a monolithically racist white society holding down a monolithically hapless black one. And he revisits Alex Haley's *Roots*, greeted as a classic upon its publication a quarter-century ago but in Sleeper's view an essentially fraudulent book. To Sleeper, Haley's well-documented plagiarisms are symptomatic of a larger imposture: the attempt to create a wholly separate historical mythology for American blacks. "The notion," he writes,

> that skin color carries a common destiny is itself the detritus of the bad scientific and cultural beliefs that bedraped 19th-century European imperialist states in all their clanking, blundering glory.

Sleeper devotes the middle of his book to the institutions that help promote the categorizing of Americans by race. For him, the *New York Times* is the Holy See of liberal racism. As evidence of the paper's pervasive double standard, he points to two columns by Frank Rich. Writing of the 1995 Million Man March, Rich managed to condemn its organizer, Louis Farrakhan, while praising the "impassioned desire" that brought 400,000 of Farrakhan's followers to Washington to pledge themselves to their families and their communities. But when, under the banner of the evangelical group Promise Keepers, a largely *white* male crowd filled Shea Stadium in New York to make a similar commitment, Rich could not damn the event vehemently enough: if Farrakhan's legions represented the hope of black America, the Promise Keepers were nothing but extremists, "pushing the full religious-Right agenda."

In the most penetrating passages in the book, Sleeper dissects the outlook not only of the *Times* editorial page but of its editor, Howell Raines. He is especially withering on a *Sunday Times Magazine* piece entitled "Grady's Gift," in which the Southern-born Raines mawkishly narrated the story of how a black housekeeper opened his eyes to the evils of segregation. All this gives bite to one of Sleeper's keenest generalizations about liberal racists: "They behave remarkably like 'quality white folks' in the Old South, who condescended sweetly to blacks while projecting contempt for inferiors onto poor whites."

The *Times* is hardly alone in exacerbating our racial—and ethnic—divides. Civil-rights organizations like the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, loudly seconded by spokesmen for other minorities, invariably demand that group differences be codified in such quasi-separatist measures as the 1982 amendments to the Voting Rights Act. This legislation has produced outcomes like New York's 12th Congressional District, which trickles out of Manhattan's Lower East Side, crosses the East River, and runs off in a squiggly line through a half-dozen far-flung enclaves of Brooklyn and Queens—all to ensure that Hispanics can win a seat in Washington. The result: heightened tensions in neighborhoods now divided by a political boundary as well as by race. Thus do the politics engendered by liberal racism foster and deepen the very polarization they claim to combat.

FOR ALL his disenchantment with today's liberals, Sleeper is no conservative on race. If liberals err in their obsession with skin color, conservatives, he writes, are naive to insist that we can all compete on an equal footing. The free-market principles pushed by the Right do not reckon with the special historical disadvantages of blacks.

Between the Left and the Right, Sleeper thus concludes, there is very little to choose from in American politics today. And so in the last third of his book he tries to envision an alternative, one that will partake equally of universalist principles and particularist solutions. For Sleeper, that alternative lies in encouraging the forces of "civil society," by which he means the network of informal and voluntary associations—"Little Leagues and bowling leagues, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, neighborhood-improvement groups, church-

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL *is senior writer at the* Weekly Standard.

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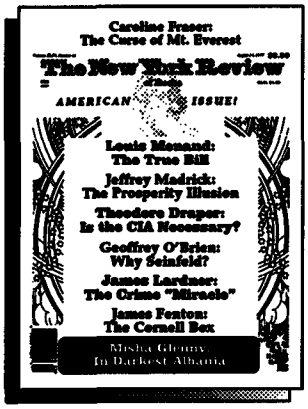

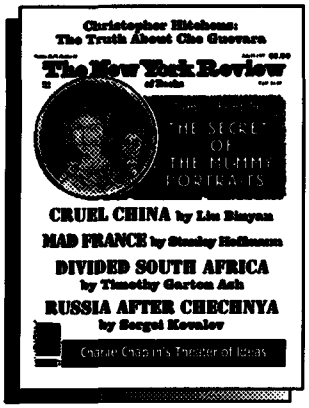

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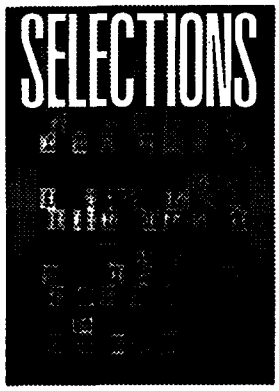

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es, parent-teacher associations"—that allow people to choose companions according to shared interests and to treat one another as individuals rather than as racial types.

It is through the medium of such associations that blacks can find, in Sleeper's view, a way into the American mainstream. For a model of what he has in mind, he turns to the "Calvinist" society of 19th-century Great Barrington, the Massachusetts town that produced W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963), the great historian, philosopher, and champion of black equality. Despite its sometimes ruthless parochialism, Du Bois's hometown, with its high expectations of civility and public-spiritedness, did something right that we are getting wrong. Sleeper quotes Du Bois himself on "the gift of New England to the freed Negro": "not alms, but a friend; not cash but character."

Unfortunately, it is the institutions of civil society—from union halls to block associations—that liberals have most doggedly targeted as racist and, therefore, in need of a race-based reconstruction. Sleeper urges his fellow liberals to turn away from that approach and to focus instead on the moral possibilities of a thriving civic culture. Such a culture might draw on any particular "taproot": the "passional communalism" of Southern black Baptists, the "class-tinted folkways" of West Virginia coal miners, the "solid, working-class black traditions" of South Side Chicago. But to succeed, it must aspire to goals shared by all Americans.

Liberal Racism is a welcome contribution to the current debate over race. But it is also disappointing. For one thing, the book is already somewhat dated, rehashing far too many episodes from *The Closest of Strangers* and dwelling on matters distant from today's disputes. It would be hard to think of a deader horse to flog than Andrew Hacker's five-year-old *Two Nations*, and racial gerrymandering has likewise become a less urgent subject now that the Supreme Court has thrown out as unconstitutional the more egregious congressional districts created by it.

More importantly, Sleeper's admirable faith in civil society and his defense of it against contemporary liberals are deeply tinged with nostalgia. There is no going back to the small-town New England of Du Bois or even the working-class Chicago of the 1950's. Civic cultures mature over generations; once you wipe one out, there is nothing to do but wait for another to grow.

Finally, *Liberal Racism* fails to show that any movement for black progress *within* liberalism is still viable. Capitalism may take no account of civil society, but government intervention of the kind prescribed by "liberal racists" destroys it. Sleeper's own arguments leave a reader with the impression that economic progress—of the kind promised by capitalism—is the most trustworthy route to the color-blind citizenship for which he longs. But his on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand style of reasoning leaves a different impression: of a thinker stubbornly resisting being dragged any farther along the path to saying so.

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